

GIVING PLEASURE. SEE PAGE 357.

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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



"DARLING" RANDAL SAID, "GIVE ME THE RIGHT TO HELP YOU."

THE SECRET THE SOUTH WING HELD

[A NOVELETTE.]

[COMPLETE IN THIS NUMBER.]

CHAPTER I.

"**I** THINK," said Mrs. Vane, "it is quite a mistake for the girl to come here, or even to set foot in England. She had been wiser to stay in Jamaica, where probably her father's story is not known. I wonder what sort of reception she expects? For, with all her wealth, people are not likely to forget her maternal grandmother was a slave, and

that her father was a suspected murderer."

"I think you are somewhat prejudiced," said Salome Drury, quietly. "Isobel need not blush for her parents. I am sure Edgar Drury had no hand in his father's death; and if the maternal grandmother was a slave her master freed her, and afterwards married her. Her daughter, a beautiful quadroon, became Edgar's wife, so that Isobel has very little black blood in her veins."

Mrs. Vane shrugged her shoulders.

"Still, the black blood is there, and her guardian is very ill advised to permit the girl to visit England. I suppose until she is of age he has absolute control over her and her fortune?"

"Absolute; and as Mr. Bousfield is agreeable to the voyage I really do not see why Isobel should not undertake it. Then, too, money covers a multitude of sins—like charity,

this with bitterness wholly foreign to her noble nature. A great many men would not hesitate even to marry a Fijian, provided she had wealth!"

"True," said the elder lady, "but all are not alike; and if the girl chances to be pretty she will be a perfect firebrand in the county. My dear Salome, I am really sorry for you. Until now everyone has regarded you as Sir Cyril's heiress—but Miss Drury's arrival puts quite a different complexion on the case. Of course she is his niece, and you but a cousin twice removed. You need his money, she does not. But we all know that to him that hath more shall be given."

Salome rose.

"Dear Mrs. Vane, I have never hoped to inherit the property. Sir Cyril took me out of charity, and has been most generous to me."

but I have no claim upon him, and I cannot think how the idea obtained that I should one day be mistress of Drury Hall. And now, at the risk of seeming uncivil, I must beg you to excuse me. Isobel arrives by the four-thirty train, and I am to meet her. I have no time to lose."

"I will accept my dismissal gracefully," laughed Mrs. Vane. "And, by the way, Salome, you will of course bring your cousin to the flower show to-morrow? All the *élite* of the county will be there."

"Yes, if she wishes it, and is not too fatigued with her travels. Good-bye!"

Mrs. Vane stepped into her carriage, and was driven away. Once she looked back at the Hall.

"What an awfully dreary place!" she said. "Ugh! I would not live there for a king's ransom!"

A dreary place—yes! For years a dark cloud had hung over it, and the worthy people of Paston regarded it with superstitious awe; whilst not the bravest of them would have entered the south wing for untold gold.

They whispered ghostly stories of it, and if by chance after twilight a servant in passing should hear an owl hoot or a bat whirring round he or she would run for dear life, saying that old Sir Cyril's ghost was abroad.

The present owner, Sir Cyril, the old man's son, affected to scoff at the uncanny legends, but none the less it was said he cared little to visit the south wing, one room of which had been closed ever since his father was found there dead in his bed.

It was a very old, but still unforgotten tragedy, which Isobel's coming quickened into new life; and Sir Cyril's thoughts would revert to it whilst he waited his niece's arrival.

He was a strange, taciturn man, highly respected by all who knew him, but loved by none; the sternest magistrate on the bench, the greatest foe to poachers and criminals of all sorts and conditions. He had no mercy on a first fault, but to do him justice, he was no respecter of persons, generous only by fits and starts save to Salome, whom he regarded with some semblance of affection.

Sombre in all his moods, rarely entertaining and never visiting—ordering his house in an almost puritanical fashion—such a man was Sir Cyril the second.

Years ago he had married, although no one was cognisant of the fact, until his father was laid to rest; and for his bride he had chosen a pretty *dansuse*, as virtuous and kindly as she was fair to look upon. But she had died within two years of their marriage, and no other woman had ever filled her place.

It was said that the Drurys were rarely fortunate in their marriages. Of the three sons Augustus, the eldest, had wedded an heiress, who proved to be a vulgar scold, so that before six months' had passed he separated from her, himself dying shortly after.

Cyril, the second, then a man of fashion and of fast repute, chose the unknown *dansuse*; whilst Edgar—strongly suspected of the murder of his father, had taken to wife a beautiful quadroon, who dying, left him as her dearest legacy, a daughter of some twelve years—this same Isobel who was now the one absorbing topic of conversation in the county.

Salome having dressed with especial care, invaded Sir Cyril's private sanctum.

"Are not you going with me to the station?" she asked.

"No," he answered, hurriedly; "probably I should only embarrass my niece. My manner, I am aware, is far from ingratiating and for me Salome, the meeting can only be painful. You must say all that is necessary and kind, and that you may the sooner become acquainted, I shall leave you together until dinner. I hope you will be very good friends. Her father was my favourite brother, and the best of us all."

"Then you do not believe him guilty of the atrocious charge brought against him?"

"No, and I never did! But let me remind you again that I do not care to recall the hideous story. I can only hope the girl is ignorant of it. Poor Edgar! To think he should have been dead eighteen months, and I not know it!"

"I wonder he never wrote you in all the years of his exile," Salome said, dreamily.

"Read this, and you will understand his silence better; there is a note from Bousfield too. You can return both to me later on," and handing the two papers to her, he went out, leaving her free to digest them at her leisure.

Edgar Drury's letter was not long, and ran thus:—

"MR DEAR BROTHER.—After all these years of silence, and now with the hand of Death upon me, I write you in my child's behalf. Exiled, accused of the most heinous crime, maddened by the thought that even those who knew me best, believed me guilty, I fled from England, a most foolish step; but I was young then, and believed that flight was the only resource left me, and in fresh scenes, among fresh people, tried to forget the wrongs I had endured, and with them all those things I had loved and prized. I prospered mightily. Everything I touched turned to gold, and shortly, right or wrong, I married. But my wife has long since been dead, and my only child, a girl not yet seventeen, will soon be alone in the world, save me. I have kept myself acquainted with the fortunes of the family, and know that when I am gone you will be its sole male representative."

"And of you I demand that love, that care for Isobel, which, until now, I have lavished upon her. This letter, placed in the hands of my solicitor, who is likewise Isobel's future guardian, will not be forwarded to you until she has attained her eighteenth birthday, when she will hear as much of my story as Bousfield sees fit to tell her."

"I leave it entirely to her discretion whether she comes to England or no; but your reply to this, addressed to Bousfield, I am sure will largely influence her decision. For the present she remains with her guardian, who, in due time, will forward this, together with copies of the certificates of my marriage and her birth. Praying that your life has been brighter than mine,—I remain, your loving brother."

"EDGAR DRURY."

The lawyer's communication was very brief indeed.

"DEAR SIR CYRIL,—The enclosure, together with certificates of my client's marriage and Miss Isobel Drury's birth, will tell you all that is necessary. Against my will, my ward has determined to cross over to England. Before this packet reaches you she will have left by the *Euphrosyne*, timed to arrive at Southampton on the twenty-third of June. Committing her to your care.—Believe me, respectfully yours,

"DANIEL BOUSFIELD."

Salome, folding the letters, looked thoughtfully from the window.

"Poor fellow!" she said. "Poor fellow! he was so young when it all happened. I wonder a little that Isobel should resolve to come, knowing the cloud under which he lived and died. I wonder, too, how much she knows."

Then a servant announcing the brougham, she stepped out, and was soon whirling towards the station, arriving in time to meet the expected guests.

As the carriages were disgorged of their travellers, Salome eagerly scanned each new face, but for some time did not discover any lady who could possibly be her freshly-discovered relative.

But when the platform had a little cleared, she saw suddenly a girl of such marvellous beauty that men perforce turned to look at her. A slim young thing she was, of medium height, with a flower-like face of richest colouring, the skin being clear, pale olive, with a warm flush on the cheeks. The large eyes were deep, soft, and tender, and well-nigh as

black as the waving hair coiled negligently upon the nape of the neck.

She moved with silent and supple grace, and as Salome hesitated whether or no to address her, she accosted an official, in the sweetest and clearest of voices, inquiring if anyone from the Hall had arrived to meet her. Before he could answer, Salome was beside her.

"Cousin Isobel, I give you welcome," and with that she offered her hand.

The girl gave one swift, searching glance into the grave, kind face, then she answered with the simplicity of a child—

"Thank you so much. May I kiss you?"

Half-smiling Salome bent her stately head, and kissed the beautiful, scarlet mouth.

"My dear," she said, ever so gently. "I hope you will be very happy with us, and that you will let me be as an elder sister to you?"

"You are very good! I feel I love you already!" impulsively. "Your voice sounds so true and so womanly!"

A moment later they were seated in the brougham, and Salome was giving Isobel a short history of all the county families, to which the girl listened with evident interest; but when the hall loomed in sight, she exclaimed at the air of gloom overhanging it.

"It is rather grim-looking," said Salome. "You shall teach us how to make it bright; I am afraid we have been stagnating, but all that must be altered now—you are so young!"

"I am eighteen," the girl interrupted, with dignity, "and you?"

"Twenty-four; quite an old woman you see; and I have lived so long alone with Sir Cyril that I feel older than I really am."

"You do not look old!" naively, "and I am sure I shall love you!"

"I hope so; and you must remember that in all things you are to please yourself. I have fitted up two of the most cheerful rooms for you, and if there is anything you wish altered, you have but to say so! You are mistresses now!"

"Oh, no! I would never depose you, and I know actually nothing of housekeeping and its attendant worries! Oh, why is that wing closed—it is the handsomest part of the Hall!"

"It is the South wing as you see," answered Salome, flushed and confused.

"That is where my grandfather was murdered!" said the girl, quietly. "Salome, do you know the story? Ah, yes, and one day you will tell it me? Perhaps my coming has amazed you; but I have a good reason for the journey. I intend to spend all my life, all my fortune, if need be, in vindicating my father's innocence. But oh! the bitter thought—when I achieve success, and his name is once more stainless before all men—he will not know it—the good news will come too late to give him any joy, for the grave has swallowed him! Oh, my father! oh, my dear father! There is only your little girl to battle for you—but she will not brook defeat!"

With those words, the whole character of the lovely, mobile face was changed, and the set line of the scarlet lips showed that whatever quality she lacked it was not determination.

"My dear," said Salome, a little uncertainly, "do not think of such things now."

"I think of it at all times, since Mr. Bousfield told me the little he considered necessary for me to know. He said I had set myself a hopeless task; but I will not believe that, and surely Uncle Cyril will help me."

"The subject is so painful to him that it is seldom mentioned in his presence; be careful not to broach it suddenly, he loved your father dearly."

"And because it is painful to him to remember all my father suffered, he makes no effort—has never made any—to bring the real culprit to justice?" asked Isobel, quickly. "His is not love at all, for true love is self-sacrificing. Is he glad or sorry that I am taking him by storm?"

"He cannot fail to be glad. You will bring

new life to the Hall!" then, having alighted, she turned to Isobel, and kissing her said, "Welcome home, dear," and so led her in.

"Where is my uncle? Why does he not come to meet me?" asked Isobel, pausing in the hall, "at home, we do not welcome our friends thus!"

"You must not judge Sir Cyril by any given rule; he is not like other men, and people say that his wife's death utterly changed his character. But you will see him presently. In the meanwhile come to your room, and Alice, the maid specially set apart for you, shall bring you coffee, that will refresh you after your long journey," and then she went away to her own apartments.

The coffee being duly brought in, Alice proffered her services, but Isobel declined with a smile.

"I am used to helping myself, thank you, and shall manage very well. How pretty this room is!"

"It is miss! The roses and wisteria are something wonderful! Miss Salome used to make this her boudoir, but she said you had been accustomed to having everything bright about you, and so she gave it up to you."

"But I can't allow that," cried Isobel, impetuously, "She must not sacrifice herself to me. Will you take me to her, that I may tell her so?"

"She wouldn't like it, miss! She loves to do kind things, but she hates to be thanked for doing them. Miss Salome is next door to an angel!"

"But I shall be miserable knowing I have ousted her from her rooms!"

"Indeed, miss, you need not. If you are pleased she will be more than satisfied. You will excuse me, miss. I had forgotten to lay out her dress!" and then, as Alice disappeared, Isobel rose.

There were tears in the lovely luminous eyes, for kindness always touched her keenly; indeed, she was extravagantly grateful for the least little service, and Salome's gentle thoughtfulness, touched her keenly.

"She is very good and kind," she said, under her breath, "and, if I am patient, she will help me," then, as she thought, the old look of stern resolve settled once more on her beautiful face, and she held her head erect, as her gaze wandered to the gloomy windows of the south wing.

"Father," she said, "oh, my father! How often I wondered why you so rarely smiled, and why life held no least pleasure for you. Now I know, and oh, Heaven helping me, I will yet clear your dear name of this foul blot," and then she fell on her knees, and prayed with all her heart, that her's might be the hand to wipe away the stain!

When she had grown calmer, she rose and dressed, taking especial care with her toilet, being so wishful to win her uncle's love. Salome gave a quick cry of admiration as she saw her standing in the open doorway. She was wearing a gown of some soft Indian stuff of a deep, orange hue, and at her breast and in the raven masses of her hair, blood-red lilies burned like fire.

"Shall I do?" she asked, with a bewildering smile. "Will my uncle approve me? Or am I just a wee bit too barbaric?"

"You are perfection. He must needs be proud of you," said Salome, and putting an arm about the supple waist, she half-led, half-drew Isobel to Sir Cyril's sanctum.

As they entered he rose to meet them; and it seemed to Isobel he looked relieved as his eyes rested upon her.

"You are not like your father," he said, slowly, "Edgar was fair; but I am glad. I don't think I could bear to be daily reminded of him, as I should be if you were in the least a Drury. For his sake now, and shortly for your own I hope, you are welcome dear." He did not, however, attempt to kiss the upturned face, or even so much as touch her hand.

Chilled by his manner, Isobel drew back.

There were tears in her eyes, and her lips quivered ominously.

"You are sorry I came?" she asked, in a very low voice.

"No!" wearily, "oh, no! You are a Drury and this is your rightful place. I am pleased to welcome you; but I am a man of few words. In time you will understand me and not expect much of me! Now, shall we go into dinner, my dear? You must be almost starving!"

And Isobel, remembering Salome's words, "You must not judge Sir Cyril by any given rule," tried to be content with his very lukewarm welcome. But deep down in her heart was the conviction that she and her uncle would never be great friends, and she whispered to herself,

"He is no more like my father than I to Hercules!"

CHAPTER II.

"Would you care to go to the Flower Show, Isobel? It is the affair of the year at Paston. This afternoon all the *élite* will be gathered together, and it will be a splendid chance for you to get acquainted with your neighbours. There is always a good band, and some of the exhibits are well worth seeing. In the evening the middle classes, and the better sort of villagers attend. It is a great treat to them!"

"I shall like to go. It is kind of you to suggest it Salome!"

"Well, we will make up a small party. Mrs. Vane has kindly consented to *chaperone* us, and Randal, her son, will go with us too. He is quite a favourite of mine, and as they are our nearest neighbours, I want you to know them well. Miss Vane goes with Mrs. Irving, to whose brother she is engaged, so the brougham will carry us comfortably."

"At what time do we go into the grounds?"

"About half-past two; but punctuality is never the order of the day; only, if one is tolerably early, one escapes the greatest crush. I will order lunch at one. Now, if you will excuse me, dear, I will get through some of this correspondence!"

"Oh, treat me quite as one of the household. I do not wish to be considered in the light of a guest, and I can occupy myself with a book."

So the morning passed quickly and quietly. After lunch Isobel went away to dress, lingering longer than usual over her toilet, because for her dear father's sake she wished to make a good impression upon those who had known him long ago.

When she came down Salome was already dressed and waiting. She affected dark colours and a somewhat matronly style; but she looked very nice in her black silk and laces, unrelieved by any colour save a cluster of pink roses at her throat.

"My dear," she said, taking Isobel's hands kindly, "you make me appear quite a dowdy. There, stand back and let me admire your dainty finery!" and laughing a little the girl obeyed.

Her great, star-like eyes were bright with excitement, the exquisite mouth was curved in a faint smile, and the gown she wore was well calculated to enhance her charms.

It was of maize net and lace, and at her throat, in her belt, she had arranged clusters of scarlet geraniums. The wide brimmed hat she wore was adorned with the same natural flowers.

"My dear," said Miss Drury, "there will be none to compare with you. Do you know how very lovely you are, child, and that beauty is a power!"

Isobel flushed hotly.

"I suppose I am pretty," she answered naively, "but I do not think I have given much thought to that. My mind has been filled so long with one idea."

"And that idea for to-day you must relegate to the back ground," smiled Salome.

"Come, dear, the carriage is waiting!"

In the hall they met Sir Cyril.

"Do you make one of our party?" asked Isobel, laying a detaining hand upon his arm. "I! oh, no. I have a strong personal objection to any sort of festivity; but I hope you will enjoy your first outing. Your cousin tells me the flower show is really good; and you are looking charming," and with that he passed on; but there was a cloud on the girl's brow.

"Why does he persist in treating me as a stranger? Why does he think it necessary to pay me trite compliments?" she asked.

"I am sure he wishes to be all that is friendly, dear, but he has an unfortunate manner. You will get used to it in time."

"Perhaps," said the girl, sadly, "if I had been like papa in face and mind he would have loved me better."

"He is glad that you resemble your mother. He loved your father too dearly to wish to be reminded hourly of the loss he has sustained. Now look your brightest, for there is the Vane's house, and that is Randal coming to meet us."

A tall young fellow, with an open, honest face, and the frankest of blue eyes, ran down the steps.

"Salome, how good of you to bring Miss Drury along," and then as the ceremony of introduction was gone through the unmistakable glance of admiration he bent upon her deepened the colour in the girl's face. "I hope you will like England and us," he went on, with a pleasant laugh, "and you see for yourself we do occasionally get a really bright and hot day. I believe those reared abroad imagine the sun is unknown to us. Ah, here comes the mater. Mother, you see how good Salome has been to us?"

The lady gave one swift, startled glance into the exquisite face opposing her, then she said a few coldly courteous words; but it was evident to her son that for some reason she was not too well pleased, and the drive to the grounds was rather silent.

Randal, with a coolness that characterised most of his proceedings, took possession of Isobel, and led the way, whilst Salome followed with Mrs. Vane.

"I am inclined to be angry with you!" remarked the latter. "I said if the girl was pretty she would be a perfect firebrand in our midst—*pretty!* Why, she is the loveliest creature I have ever seen, and, with a glance at Randal, young men are so susceptible. She ought never to have left Jamaica!"

"That was for herself to decide," Salome answered, coldly, "and I am very glad to have her here. She is as nice as she is beautiful. I only hope we shall not swoop lose her," and seeing the subject was distasteful to her companion, Mrs. Vane wisely said no more.

Randal conducted his charge through the tents, stopping now and again to introduce her to friends and acquaintances.

Flossie Vane, his sister, was delighted with her, and said eagerly they must be very good friends, and Randal thought she had never been so pretty or so winsome as when, regardless of conventionality, she kissed Isobel, saying—

"It is a liberty, I know, but you are so lovely, and you must be so lonely. May I call and see you to-morrow?"

"I shall be glad. Salome allows me to receive just as though I, and not she, were mistress of the situation."

"Salome is a darling!" and, with a gay good-bye, Miss Vane moved on with her little train of friends.

"How insufferably hot it is," said Randal. "Have you seen enough? If you have we will go into the open. We shall hear the band better, and can criticise all new-comers to our hearts' content. I know of a seat under a huge walnut, just the levellest coign of vantage. Will you come?"

"Yes. The noise is making me quite stupid. Oh! Mr. Vane!" as they emerged into the open, "how beautiful it is! I used to dream as a child of my father's native land, and wondered why he, who loved it so dearly should

never wish to revisit it! Now I understand," and she lifted her wonderful eyes to his. "You, of course, know his sad story?"

"Yes. The Drury and Vane have been neighbours for years; I could not well avoid knowing it. But, Miss Drury, upon my honour, I believe your father was as guiltless as myself of the crime of which he stands accused."

She turned to him with an impulsive gesture.

"Thank you! oh thank you for those words! It is good to know that there are a few living who yet have faith in him. Mr. Vane, he simply could not have done it. Why, he was too tender and great-hearted to harm a living thing. My mother worshipped him, and I—oh! when I lost him, I felt as though never any more could I be glad! And I have set myself a task for his sake, in which I shall not falter. I am resolved to unravel this awful mystery surrounding him. And alas! no one is willing to help me!"

"I would help you," impetuously, "if I knew how. Tell me what to do?"

And as they reached the sequestered seat of which he had spoken, he turned to her with eager haste; and, from different causes, each forgot the passing crowds, the time and place, and were deaf to the sweet strains the band discoursed.

"You may tell me first the details of the tragedy," said Isobel. "At present I know only the bare outlines, and I do not wish to harass Salome with my questions. She does not like the subject; and I am afraid to approach my uncle upon it. I—I am sorry to say I think we shall never be great friends!"

"Sir Cyril is not a man one can easily approach. I often wonder if he ever was guilty of any human weakness. I suppose once he was, for those who remember him as a young man say he idolised his wife, and that her premature death changed him from a careless, pleasure-loving man to what he now is. I don't know if I am quite justified in telling you the Drury tragedy, but—"

"You will not refuse a daughter's prayer?" eagerly, passionately. "Think if it were your father, who had lived and died under such a foul and groundless suspicion, would you tamely allow him to rest in his dishonoured grave, his name a byword, his memory execrated?"

"Oh no! no! no!"

"Then help me to find the real culprit, and then—"

"Then," he asked quickly, "what will you do?"

"I cannot say yet. Heaven knows I would not wish him to suffer the penalty of the law! Would that bring my father back? But he must clear his dear name from this stain. And then—well, I will go back to my home, to his grave, and there I will whisper what I have done, and how those who were hasty to condemn him have repented their haste; and he will hear and understand."

"But you are too young and too weak for such a task. You will need strong hands and a stout heart to aid you. Miss Drury, I do not think I am a coward. Let me be your aide-de-camp?"

"Will you?" looking fearlessly into his clear, honest eyes. "Ah! I am sure I may trust you, and with all my heart I thank you. We will succeed, we must succeed. And now, please, the story you promised?"

Mrs. Vane, watching from a distance, frowned, and bit her lip in anger.

"She is lovely, and he is impressed by her," she said to herself; "but I will move Heaven and earth before he shall marry a murderer's child! I wonder she has the audacity to appear in public so soon."

Happily ignorant of the lady's wrath, Isobel sat with hands loosely clasped before her, her large dark eyes fixed upon the young man's face. Her lips a little parted with excitement, for now, for the first time, she was to

hear the full history of the Drury tragedy. And, without any preface, Randal began:

"Augustus Drury had been dead nine months when his father, old Sir Cyril, met his death. The present Sir Cyril was living in town, and Edgar had been absent from home for several weeks, when he suddenly, and without warning, returned. The old man, he was your grandfather, and, perhaps, I ought not to tell you this, was a harsh and wicked old reprobate, and his sons had never given him either affection or confidence; and now, when he lay weak and ill upon his bed, Edgar was the only relative who thought it necessary to visit him. He came late one October afternoon, and went straight to his father's room, where Jenks, the butler, left him. Father and son dined together, and seemed on a fairly friendly footing, but towards midnight the servants heard high voices in angry dispute, and Jenks thought of going to mediate between them, being a privileged person, when there came a sudden lull. After that all was intensely quiet; but no one suspected mischief, and all retired to their rooms. In the morning Sir Cyril was found dead, stabbed to the heart, and Edgar was gone."

"The room in which the old man slept is, as you know, on the second floor, and surrounded by a balcony. The police stated that the murderer, whoever he might be, had escaped by dropping from this to the ground, for the floor of the balcony had traces of muddy feet upon it, and the ground beneath bore the impress of the same foot, and there were those who swore it corresponded with your father's in shape and size. He was the last person seen or known to have been with your grandfather—they had quarrelled violently, and he had left the house secretly."

"Everything told against him, and a warrant was issued for his arrest, and then he made his first false step. He fled, being afraid of conviction, and he left behind him a letter in which he stated that he had received tidings of the murder and of the charge against him. He could not stay to face an almost certain doom, and so he was going away to hide himself from all who had ever known him."

"No clue to the real murderer was ever discovered; but from all I have learned of your father's previous character, I cannot believe him guilty, and yet what least ray of hope is there to prove him otherwise?"

"I do not know; I cannot see clearly yet," the girl answered, a little wildly. "It is all dark, but somewhere there must be light, and in some way I shall find it. Thank you, Mr. Vane, for your patience and kindness. I shall not forget them!"

"And you will draw upon my patience and kindness, as you are pleased to call them, until you have no further need of me!" eagerly. "And then together we will rejoice over our discovery!"

With childlike trust, touching in its simplicity, she laid her hands in his.

"You must teach me how to thank you, for now my heart is too full for words!"

He knew that curious eyes were upon them, and so he released the slender fingers quickly, though, indeed, he would fain have held them fast, for the glamour of her sweetness and beauty was upon him, and all his pulses throbbed with a sudden wild rapture.

"It is a compact," he said, as calmly as he could. "I am your friend until you shall need a friend no more!"

"Once my friend always my friend," she answered, gravely, and then she rose. "Salome is signalling me. Shall we go back to her? No; I don't care to see the tents again. It is better out here."

So he took her back to her cousin, and Mrs. Vane adroitly contrived to separate him from Isobel.

"Randal," she said, in an angry whisper, "you must be mad to render yourself so conspicuous with that octoroon. She is beautiful, but," with an expressive shrug of her shapely shoulders, "she is impossible, you know!"

"I do not know that. Apparently Lord Clanroy does not think so!"

"rooh! He is not serious in his attention. What man would marry a criminal's daughter?" "I would if I loved her, and she would have me!" said Randal, stoutly, and turned on his heel.

It was impossible to obtain further speech with Isobel that day, and he returned home in a discontented frame of mind. But the following morning Flossie, joining him in the garden, said:

"I wonder," with an arch glance at him, "if you would care to go with me?"

She was a pretty little woman, and Randal was very proud of her, very willing at any time to accompany her on any excursion, whether of pleasure or business, so now he said, pulling one tiny ear:

"Where are you going, Floss?"

"I thought of walking through the meadows to the Hall. Our new acquaintance so favourably impressed me, I want to see more of her. Isn't she lovely, Randal?"

"Is she?" conscious of a slightly heightened colour.

"Of course she is, stupid! Oh, where were your eyes yesterday, not to find that out! But, perhaps, she isn't quite your style, and you do not care to go?"

"Oh! I'll go, if only to oblige you!" quickly, and Flossie, with a delicious move, said:

"What a dear, unselfish creature you are!"

CHAPTER III.

"Sir Cyril—Uncle, can I speak to you a moment?" said Isobel one morning, when she had been a month at Paxton.

She was pale with excitement, and the hand resting upon the table was very tremulous, and her eyes were eager.

"What can I do for you?" he answered, looking up. "I am yours to command—that is to any reasonable extent."

"Thank you much! I do not think you will consider me unreasonable. I am only desirous to clear my father's name," and now, in her eagerness, she came to his side and laid her hands entreatingly upon his arm. "I have been here four whole weeks, and I have done nothing yet. I feel myself unworthy to bear his name—his dear, and, to me, his honoured name—until I have done something in his cause."

Sir Cyril's cold, grey eyes met hers steadily.

"May I ask how long this idea has possessed you, and what it is you propose doing?"

"It has been with me ever since Mr. Bousfield told me a little of the truth. I propose to spend myself and my fortune in finding the real murderer. Surely you do not believe your brother guilty?"

"I do not think he was; but one cannot be certain."

Her hands relaxed their gentle hold, the blood rushed in a crimson tide to her face and brow, and her eyes flashed indignantly.

"If, for a moment, you believed him so bad, you never deserved the love he gave you!" she said, in a low, tense voice. "And yet you are his brother!"

"You speak bitterly and unjustly," Sir Cyril answered, not moved in the least from his calm; "but I excuse you on the score of your youth. Tell me how you proposed setting to work on this self-imposed task?"

"I want you to give me the keys of the South Wing. I should like to begin my labours there; it seems to me I should find some clue there."

"The South Wing is given over to the moths and corruption. All that was possible to be done with regard to discovering the murderer was done years ago. Let it rest. I will not allow the awful scandal to be revived!"

The hot blood in the girl's veins revolted at his arbitrary tone and manner.

"Sir!" she said, almost fiercely, "it has never yet died out! It may be nothing to you that men speak evil of your dead brother, but it is all to me; and with or without your con-

sent I shall begin and pursue my search!" and she went swiftly from the room, Sir Cyril watching her retreating figure with moody eyes.

"The girl is a termagant," he said, slowly. "I suppose she resembles her mother," and he turned again to his books.

But Isobel went to Salome.

"He won't help me!" she said, with a catch in her breath. "He cares for nothing but his own comfort, his own peace of mind; but I am not easily foiled. I have an almost unlimited command of money, and I can employ the best talent to help me. Oh! Salome, put yourself in my place, would you not do even as I am doing?"

"If I could screw my courage up to the sticking point. But, dear, I am afraid after all these years your search will be fruitless."

"No, no. I shall succeed, because my heart is in my work; and soon or late I shall force an entrance into that room."

"Oh, Isobel! Why, even I, who am reckoned brave, would not enter there for untold gold. Not that I believe in ghosts, but, don't you know, the room has been left all these years just in the state in which it was found the morning following the tragedy. Nothing has been altered; not even the blood stains have been removed from the carpet."

Isobel grew pale, but her resolute face showed that she was in no way moved from her fixed determination.

"Ah! you have nothing at stake," she said, gravely. "I have my father's honour. There, let us say no more about it—it troubles you, and I want time to think. You are too busy to go out, I suppose?"

"This morning? Yes, dear. I have some accounts to get ready for Sir Cyril. Later I shall be entirely at your service."

She sighed a little as she looked after the slight, graceful figure in its white gown, sitting across the lawn to the meadows beyond.

"I wish she would think more kindly of Cyril," she mused, "and that he could understand her better. Surely he would love her if he did," and then she turned again to those "tedious accounts," as Isobel termed them.

The girl walked rapidly. Her brain was in a whirl, her heart was hot and angry within her.

"He will make me hate him!" she said, aloud, and with considerable vehemence. "How dare he speak slightly of my father—his brother—whose shoeing he was not worthy to tie! But does he suppose, by a look or a sneer, he can make me think as he thinks, play the traitor as he plays it?"

Then, as she turned a bend in the meadows, she came face to face with Randal Vane.

"Oh," she said, naively, "it is you. I was going to see Flossie."

"She is very much engaged. Won't I do as well? Malcolm Irving is at our house, and will remain as long as Flossie permits. Shall we go through the remaining meadows?"

She hesitated a moment, then said—

"We need not be long, the distance is a mere trifle. Yes, I will go."

So he turned back with her.

"Now you must tell me what has gone wrong. You looked simply furious when I first saw you, and in your indignation you were talking aloud."

"It is my uncle angers me," she answered, swiftly. "Only this morning he has refused to help me in the object upon which you know I have set my heart. Worse still, he declares he is not sure of his own brother's innocence!"

"I expected no other. Cyril Drury never had too good an opinion of his fellow men. What do you intend doing?"

"Can you ask? And he, you know, is not my guardian, he cannot control one action of mine!"

"But he could make things unpleasant for you at the Hall. Understand, I neither think nor say he would, he is apt to be merciless to those who offend him. He might even re-

fuse you the shelter of his roof. What then?"

"I would find a refuge elsewhere. Mr. Vane, do you think it was an easy thing for me to tear myself away from my home, the friends who held me so dear, and honoured Aim so highly? Ah! no, no! I felt when I set my face towards England that my heart would break, but my purpose sustained me, and I will never leave here until I have accomplished it!"

"Do not forget we work together," he said. "Unity is strength!"

She looked into his eyes, and saw something there that made her own droop, and she so sorely trembled that she could not speak. But Randal took her hands in his, and drew her nearer, nearer still, until she was held close in his embrace.

"Darling," he said, "give me the right to help you. I love you, oh! yes, with all my heart I love you. Let me work for you!"

A tremulous joy was on her face, as shyly she lifted her eyes to his.

"You mean," she whispered, "that I am dear to you, despite the cloud upon my name?"

"I mean I worship you, my beautiful sweet-heart," he cried, passionately, "that if you will not listen to me, no other woman will ever bear my name! Isobel?"

"Yes," with a sigh of utter happiness, "what would you say?"

"Can you care a little for me? Darling! darling! I love you with all my soul!"

"And I you!" she breathed back, with all the abandonment of her half southern nature, and then he kissed the sweet mouth, the loving, lovesome face, and was silent for awhile because his happiness was too great for speech. But presently he said—

"And when shall it be, Isobel—our wedding?"

"Oh, not for ever so long!" naively; then, with a sudden flash in her marvellous eyes, "never, until I can come to you with my name 'clean and free from devil's dirt,' as one of your great songstresses says. When you and I together can cry to a cruel world, 'Edgar Drury was innocent,' then, and only then, will I link my life to yours. Not a word, I will not hear you. Oh, my dear! oh, my dear! I love you too well to ever bring shame into your home!" and then she clung wildly to him, and wept a little space, for though she had high courage and great powers of endurance, there was yet enough of her mother's race in her to make her at times like a little child in fear and simplicity.

And Randal soothed her after the fashion of lovers from time immemorial, until the brightness returned to her face, and, leaning on his arm, she looked into his eyes with eyes all aglow with love, and listening to his words she forgot to be afraid of the future.

With all the boundless confidence of youth, they talked together of the time, not far distant, when their search being ended in a great and blessed triumph, they, too, should join hands never to part again on this side of the grave. When Isobel, as Edgar Drury's daughter, might hold her head erect and proclaim her father no more an unconvicted criminal, but a martyr; and the time flew fast for them indeed.

It was not until the church bells chimed two that Isobel remembered Salome and her uncle would be waiting luncheon. Then, with little imperious hands, she thrust him away.

"Let me go now, or I will not give you one minute alone to-night. You know how resolute I am on occasion. Go, go, dear Randal; you must be reasonable!" and then she skillfully eluded the arm he put out to stay her passage, and fled by him like an antelope; but at a little distance she turned and kissed her hand to him. The envious trees and bushes hid her from his sight, and he went slowly and thoughtfully homewards.

It struck Salome that Isobel was unusually quiet at luncheon, and that her appetite was

of the poorest, but she said nothing until they adjourned to her boudoir. Then, with an affectionate arm about the girl's waist, she said:

"What is it, Isobel? Have you anything to tell me?"

The lovely face flushed rosy red, the shy eyes drooped.

"Oh, yes, dear cousin. Randal has asked me to-day if—I cared enough for him to be his wife!"

"I have seen this coming," softly stroking the raven hair, "and you, my bonnie, what did you say?"

The child looked up fearlessly then.

"I told him I loved him, and, oh, I do with all my heart, and I said I would marry him when all this mystery is made clear; never till then, oh, never till then! He shall never live to be ashamed of me!"

The gentle hand still smoothed the abundant tresses, but not a word did Salome speak until she was certain her voice was well under control, then she said:

"Heaven send you both all happiness," and, stooping, kissed Isobel gently.

But her heart was very heavy, knowing, as she did only too well, in what light the Squire and Mrs. Vane regarded Edgar Drury's daughter.

"Heaven help me," she prayed, "trouble will come of this," and then, aloud:

"And when is Sir Cyril to know of your engagement, little one?"

"To-morrow; after—after Randal has told the Squire. Salome, you do not think, dear, that in my happiness I shall forget with what purpose I came to England?"

"I know you better, child; and, now, as the Vane's dine with us to-night, all in your honour, you know, you must make yourself look your loveliest; and I intend to dress your hair in the most approved style. Flossie will be delighted when she learns the news. You have quite won her heart."

"Salome," hesitatingly, "do you think Mrs. Vane quite likes me? Sometimes I have seen her looking at me so curiously that I have been afraid, all unconsciously, I have given her offence."

"She is not by any means an effusive woman, dear. Do not worry yourself with fancies like these, but come with me and let me select your dress. Randal, I know, likes you in white. We will study his taste this evening."

But, contrary to Isobel's expectations, the evening was not a particularly happy one. Mrs. Vane seemed wonderfully alert, and, thanks to her clever generalship, the lovers had no least chance of private speech, although Flossie, who also had an inkling of the true state of affairs, endeavoured to assist them.

"Never mind, darling," whispered Randal at parting, "after to-morrow we shall not be subject to such restrictions. Good-night, and Heaven bless you!"

And in the morning he went to his father. He had not much hope of sympathy in his love affair from Mrs. Vane, knowing her opinion with regard to his *fiancée*; but the Squire had always been so indulgent to his every wish that he really did not expect any opposition from him.

So it came upon him with a dreadful shock, when, having heard him out, the Squire said, sternly:

"I have been deaf to your mother's warnings, because not for an instant did I believe they had any substantial foundation. I thought you held your name too dear to give it to the child of a half-caste and a murderer. I refuse my consent, and if you persist in fulfilling your ill-advised contract I can only say that I shall at once discontinue your allowance. You have no profession, and I scarcely think you would sink so low as to become your *fiancée's* pensioner. Pray let me hear no more of this folly!"

"By your leave, father, I cannot let things slide thus. Is it nothing to you that all my life's happiness is bound up in Isobel? Would

you have me act like a cur, and break faith with the woman I love? Stay, I have not finished yet. I wish to ask you if this stain can be removed from Edgar Drury's name, would you still object to receive his daughter as your son's wife?"

"No, although I confess I would much prefer you should have chosen a woman your equal in every respect. Personally, I have no dislike to Miss Drury, and she is undoubtedly lovely. But in withholding my consent I am doing you a service you will one day appreciate. Without a doubt she is the child of a partridge!"

"I never shall believe that, and if she were I would still marry her, if she would have me; but she makes it a condition that our wedding shall never be solemnised until the truth is known and established beyond dispute!"

"I am glad she is so sensible. Of course, you understand your mother must be made acquainted with this story. She will be distinctly angry. Miss Drury is antagonistic to her. You must understand, too, that, although Flossie is at liberty to visit the girl, we decline to receive her here until matters are satisfactorily settled!"

"I think you are acting with undue severity towards us both," the young man said, bitterly; "but there is nothing left for us but submission!"

"Or renunciation of each other!" answered the Squire as he left the room.

Mrs. Vane was angry beyond measure when acquainted with Randal's engagement, and was for forbidding Flossie to hold any communication with her; only that young lady had a will of her own, and was in the habit of using it freely. Besides which, she was very fond of her brother's fiancée.

Then Sir Cyril had to be told. And for the first time in her life Salome saw him stirred to anger. He was simply furious that a Vane should treat a Drury with indignity, and used his powers of persuasion to induce Isobel to cancel her engagement. But the girl was firm.

"No!" she said. "Come what may, I will keep faith with Randal, and I do not blame Mr. and Mrs. Vane overmuch. If you have doubts of your brother's innocence, can you wonder that strangers are so firmly convinced of his guilt?"

And, seeing arguments and entreaties alike were vain, he desisted. But certainly it did not seem as though the course of the young couple's love was to run smoothly.

They met in the fields or the gardens; but neither visited the other's home. But in Salome, Isobel found a great help and comfort.

CHAPTER IV.

September had come, but the lovers were apparently no nearer the solution of the mystery than at the beginning; and, if the truth must be told, Randal was fast losing hope. Only Isobel would not believe that failure was possible; and not for an instant did her courage desert her, not for a moment did she waver in her fixed resolve.

It was on a bright morning that Salome asked her if she would care to drive to Paston Wyke, where the sessions were held.

"Sir Cyril is on the bench, and he has been telling me of a desperate poacher who is to be tried to-day. It seems that years ago he was quite a notorious character, and for his misdeeds he was transported. He returned to England three days ago, made his way to Paston, and beginning his old malpractices was at once arrested."

"What has he done?" asked Isobel. "Anything very dreadful?"

"Not dreadful. But he was caught with a couple of partridges in a bag, and as he could not give a satisfactory account of how they came into his possession, he was locked up. His wife is quite a decent body, and has struggled hard to maintain herself and family. But I am afraid they have been often in actual need of the mere necessities of life; but such was her pride that she has all along refused to accept charity. Poor soul! she has

had heavy trials brought upon her mainly through her elder children, who, I suppose, inherited the father's evil nature."

"I will go," said Isobel. "I have never been witness to a trial of any sort; and I have a fancy this poor fellow may not be quite so much sinning as sinned against. I think your game laws are infamous. The birds and beasts of the field ought to be common property," for, in a harmless fashion, Isobel was a bit of a Socialist. "I hope Sir Cyril will deal leniently with him."

"He will be just," answered Salome, sadly; "but his justice is never tempered with mercy. There isn't much hope for such men as Jim Blake, when they come before him."

"But there is generally the option of a fine isn't there?"

"Of what use is that to Blake, who probably hasn't a penny in the world he can call his own?"

The girl's eyes flashed, and the lovely face was instinct with indignation.

"How easy the law is for the rich," she said, taking up hat and gloves with haste. "Oh, yes, Salome, let us go! I would not miss the trial for a great deal."

They drove to Paston Wyke, and Sir Cyril was considerably surprised to see them amongst the spectators; but he made no sign that he saw them, as he sat grim and stern, awaiting the coming of each new prisoner.

There were only five in all, and their misdemeanours being very venial, the first four were quickly despatched. Then Jim Blake was brought in.

He was not an ill-looking fellow, despite his bad reputation, and he carried his head erect as if in protest against his accusers—the two constables who had taken him red-handed in his crime.

The case was very clear. He had bagged a couple of birds, and had fought hard to retain his unlawful possession of them, and had not been captured without inflicting some slight injuries on the police. Asked if he were guilty or not, he gave a short, hard laugh.

"Guilty, gents, guilty. It ain't no use for me to say no other; but don't be rough on a chap. I'd never have took 'em, only the missus lay ill abed and there wasn't a mite o' victuals in the place, and by gosh, I couldn't see her a-starvin'!"

Isobel made an impulsive movement, but Salome held her back; and then she heard Sir Cyril's cold, equal voice saying—

"Two months' imprisonment with hard labour."

She forgot everything but the sick, perhaps dying woman, of this rough fellow's love for her, and said, in a low, clear voice—

"Sir Cyril, cannot you fine him instead? I am willing to pay any sum you may fix."

Every eye was turned upon her, but she was unconscious of this. She only felt the stern magisterial gaze upon her, only knew vaguely that she was committing a breach of decorum, that the majesty of the law was in some way offended, and then, like one in a dream, she heard her uncle's voice:

"The prisoner's offence admits no fine; he must go to prison."

She turned her pitiful eyes upon the man. All the defiance and hardness had gone from his face; a look of surprised gratitude was there instead.

"Can't you let me off this time?" he pleaded. "I swear I'll pay the young lady every farthing back. Let me go, for my missus sake!"

"You have received your sentence. Officers, remove him!"

The sunken eyes flashed, as with an oath, Blake brought his fist down upon the rail before him.

"I'll make ye repent this as long as yer live!" he shouted. "It was such as yer what sent me away from wife and kids. What come of 'em with me away? My oldest boy, didn't yer yerself send him to prison for takin' a

few turnips out o' yer field—and my gal, because she was my gal, couldn't get no work—so she went wrong. Oh, curse yer! Curse yer! I'll pay yer back for this when I get out! I'll make yer—"

"Remove the prisoner!" broke in that icy voice, and Blake was dragged away, but when near to Isobel, he looked gratefully at her—

"You meant to do me good, miss," he said, "an' I ain't the man to forget that," and so suffered himself to be led out.

"Let us go," said Isobel. "I have done no good—and—and I feel wretched," so Salome, who was only too glad to escape, followed her. The chaise was still waiting for them, and as she stepped in, Isobel said, "I want you to drive me to Blake's cottage. I can't think calmly of that poor soul actually wanting food. Sir Cyril should be without sin himself to be so anxious to hurl stones at others!" and Salome, not knowing what to say, turned the ponies towards Paston.

It was not hard to find Mrs. Blake's cottage. At the door of it stood a poorly clad, half-starved looking young woman, who stared with undisguised curiosity as Isobel stepping out, and asking Salome to wait for her, went towards her.

"I wish to see Mrs. Blake," said Isobel, "is she in?"

"She's a-bed, or I should ha' been down to court to see how father got on. Yer Sir Cyril's niece, ain't yer, miss? Could yer tell me what they've done to him?" and when Isobel answered her pitifully, she covered her face with her apron awhile, and groaned as if her heart would break. Then, looking up again, said—

"It'll most kill mother, miss; he ain't been back wi' us no more nor three days, and he was drove to do what he did. There weren't never a kinder husband and father than him. But it'll come home to Sir Cyril. Oh, I'll pray every day, he'll be made to suffer as we ha' suffered! He's got a heart o' stone, miss! A heart o' stone, savin' yer presence. Yer can come upstairs; but it's a poor place!"

A poor place! Isobel's heart throbbed with indignation as she saw the wretched shelter these poor folks called home, and remembered the luxury in which her uncle lived. The ceiling was so broken, the rafters showed through, the walls were discoloured with damp, and the stairs leading to Mrs. Blake's room shook under her light step. The bedroom was clean, but utterly without furniture, save for a broken wooden bedstead, and on the mattress lay a poor emaciated creature, who looked years older than she really was.

"Mother," said the daughter, "this is Miss Drury, and she's come to see yer, an' tell yer about father; now, don't take on, there's a lovey! Yer know how bad it'll make yer, and I want yer to look spy when father comes out ag'in!"

"Then they've sent him to prison, Nance! Oh, dear! oh dear! and him not three days home! Miss, they've been awful hard on him, ay, from the first. He'd never ha' taken up wi' poachin' but it was a bad winter, and he couldn't bear to see me and the children want for bread. Then there was a awful fight twixt the poachers and gamekeepers, and one o' the keepers got hurt dreadful, an' they put that on to Jim, and sent him away. Oh, dear! oh, dear! I wish I was dead I do! How long ha' they given him?"

Isobel evaded the question, and turned to the daughter.

"Go down, please, and tell Miss Salome I shall stay awhile, and will she go home. And now, Mrs. Blake, I want to talk to you. You must not be proud with me, for your husband's sake, for should he come out and find you utterly prostrate, his very love for you would make him do something terrible. You must let me help you. He was willing for me to assist him, but the law would not allow that. The first thing you have to do is to get strong, and to do this you must have nourishing food. I am to supply that, and then, when you get

about again, you shall think of some way to repay me."

The woman caught the delicately-gloved hands in her own and kissed them.

"Heaven bless you, miss! It ain't many ladies as 'ud trouble themselves about me! Not but what Miss Salome is good; but Sir Cyril ain't fond o' partin' wi' his money, and she ain't got none o' her own. The on'y one o' the young Drury's who was worth a pin's pint was Edgar! He was always kind an' thoughtful!"

"He was my father!"

"Lor, miss! To think o' that, an' they said as how he murdered old Sir Cyril; but my Jim says no; he on'y heard about it yesterday. He was took the very night the murder was done, and he talks mysterious like o' bein' able to throw a light on that there tale!"

A sudden wild hope flashed up in Isobel's heart. Could it be that through such humble agency she was to learn the truth? The truth which should clear her father's name from obloquy, and give her to her lover's arms. But not a word did she say; only she busied herself in setting out those dainties she had sent Nance to purchase, and, having seen Mrs. Blake made comfortable, went away, promising to call again.

The next day and the next found her at the cottage. She was altogether heedless of her uncle's remonstrances, and it did her generous heart good to see her poor *protégée* slowly but surely recovering her strength. Often, too, she urged Sir Cyril to give up the keys of the South Wing, but he put her off again and again with some trivial excuse, until, being angered by her importunity, he said:

"The rooms have never been opened since that accursed deed was committed; by my consent they never shall be again. Your entreaties are quite useless!"

The slumbering fire woke in the lovely, languorous eyes.

"I will not trouble you again, Sir Cyril; but I will find a way to enter that room; and, remember, you have only to thank yourself for my disregard of your wishes!" and then she went away, casting about in her own mind for the means to accomplish her purpose. And for a few days Sir Cyril watched her with suspicion, but, seeing her always calm and self-contained, he grew to regard her threat as mere empty words, and felt a certain contempt of her she most decidedly did not merit.

October passed and November was well advanced when she and Randal met outside the Hall grounds.

"You have learned nothing?" he asked, dejectedly. "I believe the affair will always remain a mystery! Isobel, my darling, I cannot endure such suspense longer. Let me go away and make a home for you!"

But she interrupted swiftly:

"I will never be your wife whilst I am still under a cloud! Oh, Randal, my dear heart, wait and hope a little yet; the end may be so much nearer than we think, and I am resolved now to take extreme measures—there is nothing else left me to do!"

"What is it you propose doing? I confess I am all at sea!"

"But you will help me in my work? Ah! there is no need to ask you that! To night I intend to visit the South Wing, and *that* room. You must help me to reach it, because there I believe may be found some clue to the real murderer's identity. The eyes of love are keener than the eyes of law!"

"How do you propose to accomplish your purpose?"

"We must enter from the balcony—only a short ladder will be required, as it is very low. I must leave all these arrangements to you—then with a knife you can easily open one of the windows. I will come prepared with a light, and there is small danger we shall be discovered. No one voluntarily goes near the place after nightfall. I believe even Salome is imbued with the popular superstition."

"I wonder that you are so free from it," said Randal.

"I do not know that I am; but something urges me on to this quest, and even if I go alone I will go, though going might mean my death. You cannot understand all that this means to me."

"I think I do, and I fully realise my own position. Don't you know, Isobel, my darling heart, that upon our success depends our marriage, and I am impatient to call you wife?"

The girl blushed brightly.

"That thought, too, never leaves me," she said, under her breath. "Ah! don't touch me, don't kiss me now! You must not by your caresses unnerve me. I shall need all my courage and fortitude to-night. At eight o'clock, dear Randal, meet me beneath that window. You will not fail me at the last?"

"My darling, no. Have you any other instructions to give me—there must be no mistake? Oh!" with a little laugh, "I wonder what Sir Cyril would say should he chance upon us in our new characters? He's awfully down on conspirators, however worthy the motive for conspiracy!"

Isobel frowned.

"I think he does not know what charity and mercy mean. Really, I feel no compunction in playing the part I intend to plan. And now I must go. I do not wish my absence to be noticed. The only thing I hate about this affair is that I must deceive Salome. Good-bye, Randal, good-bye, and never speak again to me of despair!"

She waved her hand to him and disappeared amongst the trees, whilst he went slowly and thoughtfully homewards.

He was not at all sure of success, and he had an unpleasant consciousness that Mrs. Grundy would be scandalised if Isobel's adventure with him that night should become known. The girl never gave a thought to the proprieties, in her innocence and her desire to prove her father a much injured man she would have placed herself freely in much more equivocal positions.

Randal was not quite sure that he ought not insist upon going to the South Wing alone; but he was sure that such a proposal would not accord with Isobel's ideas.

That night the girl did not dine with Sir Cyril and Salome. To the latter she said, flushing and turning her face aside:

"My head aches, cousin. I will remain in my room, and please do not send me up a tray. I only want to be quiet, and when you are gone I shall lock my door, and try to sleep."

So Salome made her excuses to Sir Cyril, who really seemed not to notice the girl's absence, and when she was quite certain all was safe Isobel rose, put on a dark hat and cloak, and, taking a lantern, stood a moment on the threshold of her room.

Not a sound reached her, and, trembling a little, she locked the door behind her, and stole down the narrow back stairway out into the open.

When she reached the South Wing she found Randal awaiting her. It was quite dark, so dark, indeed, she could only just descry the ladder set against the balcony, and she was trembling with cold and excitement.

"Is all in readiness?" she asked, in a whisper. "We must not lose a moment!"

"All is ready. I have been up and opened the window. You are not afraid, sweetheart? Well, let me go first, I will lift you over the balcony," and he went swiftly and noiselessly up, she following with greater care. On the balcony both paused, then Randal said—

"I will go in first. Don't show your lantern yet. Wait until the curtains are drawn!"

Isobel stood white and still until he had entered the room, and assisted her in, then he softly closed the window, and, drawing the curtains, whispered—

"Show your light now, we shall need it."

Brave and devoted as she was the girl's heart failed her a moment as the pale gleam of light revealed the room in all its desolation.

There was the bed where old Sir Cyril had been done to death. The white coverlet was yellow now with age, save where some ominous red stains showed. The curtains were given over to dust and moth, and the fringe of one hung in tatters, as though the hapless victim had clutched and torn it in his death agony.

The hues of the carpet were hidden by thick dust, which never a hand had thrust away, on which never a foot had left its mark since the old man had been carried to his last resting place; but under the bed across the floor in the direction of the door, was a dull red stain, and Isobel put up her hand to hide it from her sight.

"Be brave now, my dearest," whispered Randal, "there is so much at stake!"

She looked at him and smiled, though ever so faintly.

"You need not fear I shall fail at the last moment," she said, and setting her light upon a bracket, she began to make a tour of the room; but Randal noticed she was very white and shaken.

The dust flew up in clouds about them, spiders ran across the floor, climbed the walls, and swung in their webs from the ceiling. It was a most unearthly place, and there was small wonder that Isobel's courage failed her fast.

Not a sign, not a clue of any presence but that of the murdered man was to be found. Isobel turned to her lover with quivering lips.

"If not here, surely we shall find a clue in the passage and rooms adjoining. We must. Oh, Randal! oh, Randal! I feel as though I should die!"

He caught her in his arms.

"My dear, you should have entrusted the search to me. Let me take you to a window and give you air," and as he lifted the lithe young body from the floor the jet trimmings on her sleeve caught in the bed hangings.

With a stifled cry she slipped from his embrace. How could she bear contact with that bed? and with wild fingers she tore herself away. The rotten fringe broke, the curtains swayed to and fro, and suddenly at her feet there fell a glittering substance. She fell on her knees, and took it in her hand.

"Look, Randal, look! It was caught in the gimp. I wonder the police did not see it. Oh, Randal! how much depends upon this little thing!" and then she gave him the top of a broken solitaire. It was of heavy gold, in which was set a superb ruby cut in a curious fashion. "I will keep it always," she said, as he, after examining it, carefully gave it again into her charge; "and we must try to find the fellow one. Whoever murdered my grandfather is or was the owner of it." Then she rose. "We can do no more to-night, and I dare not risk detection. To-morrow we will think how to act; and, if it is necessary, we must have skeleton keys. You do not think that I am acting dishonourably?" anxiously.

"My darling, no; and that jewel has given me fresh hope. Keep it safely. Oh, sweetheart! sweetheart! you will yet be mine!"

"Hush! do not speak now of love; we are in a haunted room. Let us go."

And so he helped her over the balcony, down the ladder, and watched whilst she fled to her room.

No one saw her, no one knew of her adventure. Pale and panting she reached her pretty chamber, and threw herself, dressed as she was, upon her bed. Pale and heavy-eyed she rose in the morning, for she had slept but badly.

CHAPTER V.

The days crept slowly by, and nothing further had been discovered by the lovers; but neither was hopeless now. And Isobel had plenty to interest her and occupy her time, having taken the Blakes into her charge.

But one morning, towards the close of November, she woke to find it so hopelessly

wet that all thought of going out was beyond the question.

She read a little, played an air half through, trifled with some delicate work, but she was restless, and could settle to nothing.

"Heigho!" she said to Salome, as she entered. "I am a very disconsolate creature; this is the first wet day we have had for a long while, and yet I find it insupportable. What am I to do to amuse myself?"

"You are to come with me," answered Salome, smiling at her air of depression. "You have never seen the Drury jewels, and Sir Cyril has entrusted me with the key of the safe, that I may show you them."

"That is kind of him," she said, as she sprang to her feet. "Shall we go now? I have often wished to see them, but have never summoned courage sufficient to ask permission."

"They went together to the study, in a corner of which stood a huge iron safe, which Salome proceeded to unlock; and then, from the cavernous recesses, she drew out such a store of glittering gold and jewels that Isobel uttered a cry of admiration.

"This," said Salome, holding to view an emerald and diamond necklace, "will one day be yours. The last to wear it was Sir Cyril's young wife; but she wore it under protest, saying it was too splendid for her quiet style. Put it on? Let me see you in your bravery? Here are the bracelets, and the ornaments for your hair. Oh, Isobel! you are splendid!"

The girl laughed lightly, and then, turning to her cousin, asked for the history of each bauble as she took it in her dainty hands; and the time went so quickly that they were surprised to hear the first bell ring for luncheon.

"Oh! I can't go yet!" Salome said. "We must lock these away first; and here is a little casket containing what I call 'odds and ends.' You may as well see those too, because it is doubtful if ever Sir Cyril will give me the keys again. Luncheon must wait. This," taking up a quaint old ring of clumsy shape and size, "is the most valuable of all, and has been in the family for generations. The setting is barbaric; but did you ever see finer rubies? And the pearls are egg-shaped."

Isobel stooped forward to examine it, when her eyes rested upon the interior of the casket. Her face went white as the lace about her throat.

"Where did you get that?" she gasped, pointing to a ruby solitaire. "To whom did it belong? Tell me! Tell me quick, Salome!"

"Isobel, you frighten me. Which is it? Sit down and try to tell me! You are as white as death!"

"Don't mind me, but answer my question. The man to whom that belonged murdered my grandfather; but how did his solitaire get here? I am not mad, I know of what I speak; the fellow one to this is in my possession. I found it in that room. Yes, I have been there, and I will go again and again as long as I have any hope of discovering the truth."

"You have startled me, Isobel, and I am afraid Sir Cyril will not be well pleased when he hears what you have done; and he must hear now, because he—and he only—can throw any light upon the ownership of that ornament."

"Then let us go at once!" Isobel cried, thrusting the jewels away with reckless hands. "Oh, Salome! I am on the track. Kiss and congratulate me, my dear."

But a strange, incomprehensible dread held Salome silent. Locking the safe, she put an arm about Isobel, and drew her from the room into Sir Cyril's presence.

He looked up with a little frown as they entered. He liked punctuality in all things, but Isobel heeded nothing now as she went forward.

"Uncle," she said, "will you tell me how this came into your safe, and who was its last

owner?" and there lay the sparkling jewel in the whiteness of her palm.

Sir Cyril started back; his face was perfectly livid, and a great horror was in his eyes.

"You do know, and you must tell me," the girl said, "for I have found its fellow. The murderer of your father left it behind him in his fright!"

Sir Cyril put up one trembling hand to shield his face, but in a moment he had recovered his ordinary manner.

"You insist upon wresting this secret from me?"

"I do!"

"You, poor child! those solitaires were my last gift to your father!"

"No!" she shrieked, "no! I will not believe it! I dare not! I should go mad! And if my father was really the owner of this fatal thing, how does it come into your possession, when he fled from Paston that very night and never saw your face again?"

"Jenks found it beneath the balcony. Your father was his favourite among us, and he was afraid that through this he might be brought to justice. He gave it to me on my arrival here, and I locked it away, never dreaming of any catastrophe to come."

"It doesn't seem feasible he should lose both," Isobel said, coldly. "Shall I tell you where the other was found? In the torn hangings of the bed. I found it. Against your will, I effected an entrance to the room, and so discovered one little clue to guide me on my way. Oh! Sir Cyril, you will not tell me, his daughter—that my father did this dastardly deed," and she sank on her knees beside him. "If ever you loved him, if ever you pitied him for all that he so unjustly suffered, help me in my efforts!"

"I dare not," he answered, in a low voice. "Better uncertainty in such a case as this than the conclusive proofs of guilt. Isobel, let the dead past bury its dead. 'It is better so, better so; and if, indeed, you would please me you will not again go to the South Wing. I won't ask you by what means you forced an entrance—perhaps I know; but it is my will that those accursed rooms shall not be opened in my lifetime. Afterwards, when you are mistress here, you will do as you please."

Isobel rose.

"I do not promise obedience," she said, in slow, cold tones; "I shall but do my duty," and all the while the soft, dark eyes rested upon the face opposing her, with a strange scrutiny. Then she added, "I may keep this, it having been my father's," and Sir Cyril, bowing, said:

"Certainly, it is yours by right. Later I will try to show you all the mischief and misery you may cause by your obstinate persistency in following up this thing. Now come to lunch."

"I want nothing, thank you, and with your permission will go to my room," and with a slight bow to him she went away.

"That girl is terrible, Salome; and this subject is quite a mania with her. She is just the sort of stuff the Jaels and Judiths are made of!"

"No," said Salome, gently; "you wrong her there. She is only wishful to establish Edgar's innocence. She loved him so dearly, and you forget that upon her success depends all the happiness of her life to come. I wish her all success."

"Salome, if only you could understand how awful this subject is to me you would never broach it again!"

"You think there is not the slightest doubt of his guilt?"

"Don't ask me! I only know the crime could not have been premeditated; and now, if you please, we will speak of other things."

To Salome's surprise, all that day and the next Isobel refused to leave her own apartments, save at such times as she knew her uncle was absent from home.

She would not sit in his presence or eat with him, and in her grief at finding the girl less

generous than she thought, Salome spoke sternly to her.

"Because Sir Cyril does not see with your eyes, should you nurse a bitter and revengeful spirit against him?" she asked. "Oh, Isobel, this is not like you!"

"You don't understand, and I, Salome, cannot explain my conduct yet; but if you love me you will acquit me of any thought of revenge. You think because I am forbidden access to the South Wing I am incensed against my uncle. I am not, because neither bolts nor bars will keep me out; but until I have cleared up this mystery I will not break bread with Sir Cyril or touch his hand!"

And what could Salome say?

The next day carpenters were at work at the Hall, boarding up the windows of the South Wing. Isobel saw and heard these things with dismay. What should she do? She took counsel with Randal, but he could see no way out of the difficulty, save in getting possession of the keys, and those were safe in Sir Cyril's keeping. Where he had hidden them no one knew or was ever likely to know. And thus matters stood when Jim Blake came out of prison. He listened to the story his wife had to tell of Isobel's goodness, and his face flushed dusky.

"She ain't a'go'in' to lose her sweetheart, because folks have chose to speak ill of her father!" he said. "It's me who can clear him, and I will! Look here, wife, I'd never ha' said a word, even though I'd no cause to loike Sir Cyril—cause t'other chap wor dead, and it couldn't matter a moite to him what folk said or thought. But I'm danged if I'm goin' to let that blessed, tender-hearted gal be trampled on," and catching up his hat, he made his way to the Hall.

He was fortunate enough to meet Isobel and Randal, for no servant would have permitted him to enter the sacred precincts of the Drury grounds.

Isobel recognised him at once, and, going forward, said:

"You are James Blake; I am glad to see you free again; first, for your own and your wife's sake; secondly, because I want you to help me, and I am sure you will if you can."

"There ain't no manner o' doubt about that, miss; I don't forgit what you 'uld have done for me, and what you ha' done for my missus. It's about Mr. Edgar yer want to speak, I reckon! Well, just to ease yer mind, miss, let me tell yer first o' all, he ain't the man what murdered Sir Cyril!"

"How do you know this?" demanded Randal.

"Cause I seed the real feller jump over that there balcony! I was hidin', sir, 'cause I'd borrowed some game, and the bobbies were arter me; and I jest made my way up here. And while I crouched in them there shrubs I heard a noise like a winder openin' and I looked up, an' there was a man comin' out o' old Sir Cyril's room—and I durstn't cry out for fear o' bein' caught myself."

"He let himself down hand over hand, and when he got to the ground there was the moon full in his face, an' I laughed a little, 'cause I saw it was young Cyril! Hold hard, miss, don't yer go for to faint!" as Isobel fell back against her lover. "It 'uld better be yer uncle than yer father! Well, I laughed, as I says, 'cause the young Drury's was very wild—at least, Master Augustus an' Cyril was—an' I thought he was goin' off in a huff 'cause his father wouldn't give him no more coin."

"He stood a bit, and looked about like a man what was mothered, then he took to his heels and went across country as fast as he could. The next thing that happened was, I got took jest as I left the grounds behind, and they sent me on a very long sea voyage—not at my own expense. That's all I ha' got to say, miss; use it as yer can. But yer ought to get better proofs nor my word—for that don't count for much. If yer want me, yer know where to find me, an' there ain't nothin' I won't do for yer!" With that he trudged

away, and Isobel, flinging herself upon her lover's breast, sobbed out:

"Help me to think; tell me what it is I must do! Oh, Randal, oh, Randal! I have suspected him lately, but the certainty is awful! He is my father's brother! Would my father wish his sin to be blazoned to all the world? I have eaten his bread and slept beneath his roof!"

"Had he mercy on his own?" demanded Randal, fiercely. "He deserves the worst the law can give. For years he has let his brother bear the odium of his crime. He has allowed you, my innocent darling, to go under a shadow all your days. He has professed to believe Edgar Drury guilty—has visited the offences of the poor and erring upon them in the fashion of an all-perfect yet all-cruel deity—let the measure he has meted to others be meted to him again. To save his own wretched life he would have sacrificed your happiness and mine without a throb of pity! He deserves no mercy!"

"Oh, but think, dear Randal. You know what his punishment must be. He is getting old—and at the last my heart fails me. Will you give me two days for thought?"

"Yes," unwillingly. "If after that time you do not act, I must!"

"So be it!" she answered, and then they parted, and Isobel went back to the Hall like a guilty creature. Her mind was in a whirl, and her heart throbbed so wildly that she fancied all must hear its loud pulsations. On the stairs she met Sir Cyril. She shrank back cold and white, waiting for him to pass; but he paused beside her, and saying:

"Isobel, why do you avoid me?" and put out his hand to touch hers, but she drew quickly back.

"Don't," she said, in a strange, hoarse voice; "I cannot bear it!"

"Do you then so hate me?" he questioned, heavily. "What have I done that you should shrink loathingly from me?"

"Oh, don't ask me! don't ask me! Let me go! Being my father's daughter, I cannot touch your hand; and yet Heaven knows I pity you with all my heart," and then, without waiting to watch the effect of her words, she rushed by him like a wild thing.

That night Salome came to her.

"You will dine with me, dear," she said. "Sir Cyril is lying down in his own room. I do not think you have noticed how ill he is of late. Dr. Coulson has advised him to prepare for the worst; and his solicitor has been with him all the afternoon. Oh, Isobel! you, who do not love him, cannot understand what pain and grief it is to me to know by what a frail thread he holds his life; any hour may end it!"

"Would he die and make no sign?" was Isobel's first frantic thought, and then a great compassion filled her heart, and the tears rose to her eyes. "If only her father's name were not at stake, he might still go free. Oh, Heaven! help her to do the right," and with that prayer upon her lips she suffered Salome to lead her down.

CHAPTER VI.

That same night, when Isobel had fallen into an uneasy slumber, Salome went to her.

"Wake up!" she cried, agitatedly. "Wake up! Sir Cyril is walking in his sleep. I dare not follow him alone! He is going to the South Wing. Once before he walked towards it so; but Jenks was alive then, and brought him safely back. Make no noise. We need not wake the servants. Are you afraid?" as Isobel hurriedly drew on a red dressing-gown.

"No," she answered bravely, although, indeed, she was trembling in every limb.

With noiseless feet they stole down the long passages, and when they came to the door of the south corridor they found it open.

The dust flew up about their skirts; noiseless insects ran helter-skelter across their way, for this passage had not been trodden by human foot since old Sir Cyril's death; but neither had time to think of fear, because before them flattered the pale light of the

master's lamp; and one of them feared that he might pass away in his sleep without speaking that one sentence which should set his brother's name stainless before the world.

Door after door yielded at his touch. He carried a bunch of keys, and never once did he choose out the wrong one.

At last he came to that room; and the two girls, following closely, entered behind him.

Salome, shuddering in every limb, made her way to the window, and noiselessly Isobel crept after her; then they turned, and their hearts grew sick within them as they watched the rehearsal of that old tragedy.

A lamp in his left hand, a short, sharp dagger in his right, Sir Cyril leant over the bed, and the expression of his face was awful. With almost superhuman strength he plunged the deadly weapon through the moth-eaten bed-clothes, burying it to the hilt; then, drawing it out, he moved swiftly to the window by which the girls stood. And then Salome could no longer control herself, and in her agony of horror she screamed aloud.

The somnambulist started, woke, and, seeing those figures in the shadowy room, terrified to find himself in so gruesome a place, he uttered one loud and dreadful cry. Then, with a crash, he fell to the ground, and lay there, supine and rigid.

The flame from the lamp caught the carpet, reached the curtains, and in an instant the room was all ablaze.

"We must get him out!" said Isobel, wildly. "We cannot leave him to die like a rat in a hole!"

She did not guess he was already dead. How they contrived to drag him into the corridor they never knew, but it was done at last; and then Isobel ran to wake the sleeping servants, and help was soon at hand. But before the fire could be extinguished the whole of the South Wing had been destroyed; and there was no one who regretted this, for at best it must always have been an uneasy place.

No inquest was necessary, Dr. Coulson having attended Sir Cyril for heart disease; so he was buried in consecrated ground. And after the funeral it was found that by his last will and testament he had bequeathed "to Salome Drury, my faithful friend and cousin, five hundred pounds per annum;" to "Isobel Drury, my brother Edgar's child, the Hall, with all its revenues free of conditions; and I hope that in the heart where her father's memory dwelt she will find a little pity for the man who loved him honestly, yet wronged him so shamefully."

"I have here," said the solicitor, "a packet given me by my lamented client on the afternoon preceding his death, which he wished me to read, and afterwards to publish through the length and breadth of the land. By your kind permission, Miss Drury, I will read it to the assembled guests."

"If you please," said Isobel; and she was glad that her lover's hand held hers so fast, for the events of the past few days had begun to tell upon her.

"Now, when the sands of life are sinking fast, I will confess the crime which has embittered all my life, and made my innocent brother an exile from home and friends. I know nothing can be urged in extenuation of my guilt—of the cowardice which allowed another man to suffer for my crime, and to darken his child's life."

"From her first coming among us I am sure my niece has regarded me with suspicion. I believe now that Heaven granted her an almost unearthly insight into my evil past. But let me say here that I never meant to murder my father, for I did murder him, although none ever suspected me, not even the wife for whose sake I became what I am."

"To make things plain I must tell you a little of my history. Augustus and I were like our father in most respects, fast and profligate men. Edgar, my father's favourite, resembled his mother, and, with the exception of a little carelessness in money matters, was without

reproach. Next to myself I loved him until I met my wife. She was a *dansuse* of humble origin, but I loved her with all my soul. I was not worthy to touch her dear hand, but I made her world.

"We were married, and soon after Augustus died, and I became heir to the property, but I could not touch a penny of it whilst my father lived."

"Not even to Edgar did I confess my marriage, and when there was a likelihood of a child being born to us I was at my wit's end how to procure dainties for my darling, my allowance being spent, and my creditors grown troublesome."

"Then I went to Edgar for help. He could not assist me pecuniarily, but he volunteered to plead my cause with my father. At what cost to himself he did so I need not tell."

"He dined with Sir Cyril in his own room, and there he made a clean breast of the matter; but the old man was furious, and vowed never to see me again, a *liaison* he would forgive but not a *méchanceté*."

"In a passion Edgar left him, letting himself out by the South door, and, so far as I can gather, meeting no one on his way."

"You will condemn me for my conduct at that time, but when my brother left town, a sudden fear that he might use the opportunity to supplant me in my father's favour possessed me—I was always of a suspicious nature—and I followed him down to Paston."

"Hidden under the balcony, I heard the end of that interview. I saw Edgar leave the house in anger, and then, being beside myself, I climbed up to my father's room. He cried out as I entered, and reviled me in the bitterest terms, bidding me leave the room I had disgraced, and lavishing every shameful epithet upon my young wife."

"There was a table beside the bed, and on the table a dagger. I snatched it up and struck at him. He shrieked feebly, and feebly struggled with me. I struck again, and, oh, Heaven! you know the rest."

"I escaped by the balcony, and for days I hid myself away from all I knew, and then I heard suspicion had fallen upon Edgar. For my wife's sake I held my peace."

"I took possession of the estate, but nothing prospered with me. First our child died, and then my wife. I, only I, was left, and by a life of severe rectitude I tried to make atonement for my crime and my cowardice."

"I would like, with my last breath, to beg my niece's forgiveness, and to wish her that happiness which has so long been denied me. I wish the history of my awful deed to be made public."

"CYRIL DRURY."

Salome, who had sat throughout the whole narrative with hidden face, burst into tears.

"He was always good to me," she said, and, perhaps, in all the world she was the only creature to accord the unhappy dead pity.

Then she turned to look at Isobel. She lay white and still in her lover's arms. At the last her strength had failed her, and she, who had been so brave throughout, had fainted like the weakest woman in the land.

"Sweetheart it is six months ago, and Salome starts shortly to join her missionary lover. Don't you think we might be married at once?" pleaded Randal Vane.

"You are so impatient, and Mrs. Vane does not like me."

"But the dad swears by you, and that equalises things. Then Flossie and her great booby of a bridegroom are almost as much in love with you as I am. You heartless little monster, come here!"

She went to him, and, laying her hands upon his shoulder, said:

"There is now no blot upon my father's name, but are you quite; quite sure that you will never feel a throb of regret when you remember that I come, from my mother's side, of a despised and enslaved race. Think well now, for after marriage there is no going back; and now, oh sweet and dear, I might

perhaps bid you good-bye, and yet in some hard way contrive to live; but after you had made me your wife I could not bear to lose your love!

"It is yours for ever and ever. My sweetheart, my queen, look in my eyes and doubt me if you can!"

She looked, and what she saw there must have satisfied even her passionate heart, for a little cry broke from her lips as she threw herself upon his breast.

"Randal! Randal! I cannot doubt you if I would!"

A month later Jim Blake's hands were the first to cast white flowers in the bridal path, Jim's voice the first to raise the hearty cheer which echoed through the shady way as Randal and his wife turned their faces to the home which should henceforth be a haven of love and peace to them.

[THE END.]

Gems

Few people disparage a distinguished ancestry except those who have none of their own.

EVERY man is valued in this world as he shows by his conduct that he wishes to be valued.

Good wishes are all right as far as they go, but they make very poor building materials for any society.

Work touches the key of endless activity, opens the infinite, and stands awe-struck before immensity of what there is to do.

No man does his best except when he is cheerful. A light heart makes nimble hands and keeps the mind free and alert.

THERE is nothing that a woman accepts so readily as a false position; nothing that after she has tried it irritates her so much.

It is a great deal easier to do that which God gives us to do, no matter how hard it is, than to face the responsibility of not doing it. We have abundant assurance that we shall receive all the strength we need to perform any duty God allots to us.

THE NOSE.

The nose being the most prominent feature of the face is a decided revealer of character. It is said that the Duke of Wellington believed in this so thoroughly that, in choosing men to fill important military posts, he was guided largely by the shape of their nasal organs.

According to one authority on the subject of "natalogy," a prominent nasal bone denotes firmness, intelligence, trustworthiness; a perfectly straight and normal nasal bone, generosity, shrewdness, courage; and a receding nasal bone, obstinacy, irritability, and pugnacity. But there is the very marked prominent nasal bone which reveals an avaricious temperament, selfishness, and lack of honesty; and the receding nasal bone, accompanied by a long-pointed tip, which suggests a nervous, nagging nature, and which is often associated with a high, squeaky voice.

A perfectly-formed nose is rarely met with, but an ugly one may be much improved by massage and various inventions which may be had at a reasonable cost.

Redness of the nose is a common affliction, but there are many remedies. The first thing to do is to find out the cause of the mischief, for a red nose may come from several other things beside cold. It may be due to dryness of the nasal duct, or extreme delicacy of the capillary vessels, when a lotion composed of eau-de-cologne, borax, and water frequently dabbed on will be all that is required. If there is any congestion or nasal catarrh, bathing with hot water at bed-time is the best thing. Women who lace their corsets tightly often suffer from a red nose; while the results of immoderate drinking and indigestion are too generally known to need remark. In the latter case strict dieting must be adhered to.

Society

THE engagement of Lady Lettice Grosvenor to Lord Beauchamp is considered an eminently satisfactory one in every way. Lady Lettice has no real claims to beauty, but she has nice eyes, an amiable expression, and a fine complexion; whilst great intellect is depicted by the broad white forehead, over which only a few love-locks are permitted to stray. Both she and her mother, the Countess Grosvenor, whom she much resembles, have a penchant for pendant ear-rings of somewhat decided dimensions.

LADY CARNARVON is pretty, piquante, and petite. She is, of course, a smart Society lady, but is intensely resourceful; and, if denied the companionship of her fellows, can interest herself with books, pictures, and furniture. Outdoor exercises and sports do not greatly interest her ladyship, though naturally she is very proud of the fact that her husband is one of the best shots in England.

MRS. CORNELIUS VANDERBILT, who had the honour of entertaining Prince Henry when he was in America, is a delightful hostess, and possesses great charm of manner. She has pretty blue eyes and an elegant figure, but her hands are her greatest beauty. They are exquisitely formed and remarkably soft and white; and the fingers are long and tapering, with shining, filbert-shaped nails.

AUSTRALIANS have indeed every reason to be proud of their gifted countrywoman, Madame Melba. It took but a brief time for the world to recognise in her one of the finest singers in existence; and a clearer, more silvery quality of voice was perhaps never heard. Madame Melba is a far handsomer and younger-looking woman to-day than she was when she came to England some twelve or fourteen years ago. She has a nice complexion and clever eyes, and, above all, a most attractive personality.

THE DUKE AND DUCHESS OF FIFE had a novel experience at Brighton on a recent Saturday. On arriving at the Central Station at five o'clock they were received by the railway officials, and proceeded to inspect the new express locomotive, the Duchess of Fife. The mechanism having been explained to her, the Duchess expressed a desire to drive the engine. The driver and fireman thereupon vacated their places, and the Duke and Duchess took them. Then, with Richardson, the company's locomotive superintendent, on the footplate, the Duchess started and skillfully drove the engine along the station line. She afterwards expressed herself delighted with her novel experience.

Mlle. HELENE VACARESCO, who received a special invitation from the Queen to attend the Coronation, will be remembered as the lady whom the course of true love would have made Crown Princess of Roumania had not the reason of State decided otherwise. However, what Prince Ferdinand has lost literature has gained. Mlle. Vacaresco's writings stand as high in the estimation of her present Majesty as did those of another authoress with the late Queen. Mlle. Vacaresco will not make her first appearance at the English Court. She was in attendance on the Queen of Roumania when "Carmen Sylva" was on a visit to Queen Victoria, at Balmoral, quite twelve years ago.

It is said of a great man, just dead, that he began life as a barefooted boy. Come to think, we boys all began that way.

PROFITABLE.—In the great glove houses of Brussels and France the cutters can earn even higher wages than the cutters of the most fashionable tailors of London. So difficult is the art of cutting gloves that most of the principal cutters are known to the trade by name and by fame, and the peculiar knives which they use in the business are so highly prized that they are handed down from generation to generation as heirlooms.

Facetiae

It is sometimes necessary for you to temporise in order to prevent the other fellow's temper rising.

THE fact that Washington never told a lie has been satisfactorily accounted for. He never went fishing.

"Do you know why a logical inference is like a dog's tail?" "No, unless it may be a natural conclusion."

"I see that you have shaved your whiskers," said Blykens. "No," replied Smatky; "I have shaved my face."

MASTER (to valet): "Sorry I can't pay you last month's wages, but as time is money, I'll give you a month's holiday."

ALL THE SIGNS.—Winks: "Who is that long-haired genius with cotton in his ears?" Jinks: "Um—a music teacher, probably."

THE good die young. The others become "oldest inhabitants," and lie about the weather, their age, and everything else.

MISS EDITH (at the dog show): "Papa is here somewhere." Jack (slightly deaf and misunderstanding): "Ah? What are his chances for a prize?"

ETHEL (to her brother who has just been whipped): "Don't mind, Tommy, don't mind." Brother (between his tears): "That's just what I was licked for, not minding."

SMITH: "I saw you sitting in the arbour the other night with your Dulcinea. Did you get her consent?" Jones: "No, rheumatism is all I got." "Well, ain't that enough?"

"I THOUGHT you were going to have a cupola on your house?" "I have." "Where is it?" "In the cellar. It looked so bad on the roof I took it off and made a coal bin of it."

MOTHER: "Now, Clara, what I want to know is, are you and Charley going to get married?" Daughter (doubtfully): "Ask Charlie; that's what I want to know myself."

MRS. SITTUP (angrily): "What excuse have you for being out so late, sir?" Husband: "Excuse! (hic) why, I had a tip top one when I left the club, but I must have lost it when I fell down."

MERE MATTER OF TIME.—Mrs. Binks: "How does it happen that Mrs. Nextdoor can afford to dress better than I can?" Mr. Binks: "They haven't been married long, and I presume he isn't quite broke yet."

HOTEL TOWELS.—Hotel Keeper: "Yes, sir; you'd be surprised at the number of towels we lose—hundreds every year, sir—hundreds." Traveller: "Ah, yes; I see. Guests mistake 'em for handkerchiefs."

WHY HE DOESN'T WORK.—Mrs. Strongmind: "Why don't you go to work?" Tramp: "Please, mum, I made a solemn vow, twenty years ago, that I'd never do another stroke of work till women was paid th' same wages as men."

TO BE EXPECTED.—Professor De Science: "Statistics show that men are growing shorter and women are growing taller." Lady: "Not unlikely. I don't know of anything that has such a stretchy effect as hanging on to tram-car straps."

HER INTERPRETATION.—Mrs. Grim: "People know you a great deal better than you think they do." Mr. Grim: "How?" Mrs. Grim: "Our church society is getting up some tableaux, and they asked me to take the part of 'Patience on a monument.'"

MYSTERIOUS ROBBERIES.—Police Captain: "Did you investigate the robberies of the St. Closette Flats?" Detective: "Yes; but have nothing to report." "No clue?" "None so far. I went around to the museums and arrested all the living skeletons on suspicion, but everyone of 'em proved an alibi."

Gleanings

THE man who has lived for himself has the privilege of being his only mourner.

"SHE doesn't belong to our set," as the hen said when the duck waddled by.

ACCORDING to law a widow is entitled to her third, but the men are generally shy after she has buried her second.

AN INTERESTING EXPERIMENT.—If you want to drive a needle through a half-crown piece, you can do it in this way: Push a needle through a cork until the point just appears on the other end, then with a pair of pliers break off the eye end of the needle until it is flush with the cork. Lay the cork on the coin, needle point down, hit it a sharp blow with a hammer, and the needle will go through the half-crown. Perhaps a bronze coin had better be used in this experiment, as punched coins are not legal tender.

A SUBSTITUTE FOR PETROLEUM.—The Germans, having no native supply of petroleum or natural gas, have sought a substitute for those fuels in alcohol, which they can produce cheaply from the potatoes that luxuriate in the sandy plains of their country. The result was seen in a recent exhibition of the industrial applications of alcohol at Berlin, where were shown alcohol driven motors for stationary engines as well as for automobile carriages; portable alcohol engines for farm work; domestic utensils, such as flat irons, heated by alcohol; alcohol cooking ranges, etc.

DANGERS OF CELLULOID.—Manufacturers of articles made of celluloid should be compelled to stamp plainly upon them the words "highly inflammable." The danger is no imaginary one. A gentleman with a lighted cigar in his mouth was playing upon an American organ furnished with celluloid keys. When some red hot ash dropped upon the keys they instantly burst into flames and flame, which could only be extinguished with the greatest difficulty. A heated curling iron will readily start the evolution of dense and highly inflammable fumes if brought in contact with a celluloid comb or hairpin. The proximity of a naked light adds to the danger enormously, for the fumes of celluloid will ignite fiercely at some considerable distance from the flame.

HALE P.—Mr. P. T. Barnum, being a pronounced joker, turned also his witty faculty to use. When he told the Adirondack landlord, with great solemnity, that he hesitated to find fault with anything about the hotel when so much was agreeable, he was urged by the landlord by all means to be frank and do so. "Well," said Barnum, "it is only one thing. I have discovered with regret that your pepper is half peas." The landlord declared it could not be, but, on being assured that Barnum knew pepper as well as ginger, he wrote a caustic letter to his grocers about sending him such stuff. They, knowing doubtless who the real complainant was, wrote back that if he would spell "pep-per," he would doubtless find half of it composed of p's and that which they sold had only the amount the orthography required.

EGYPTIAN WOMEN.—The Egyptian beasts of burden—the camel, the ox, the donkey—have the same patient look as the people. It may not be improper to add another beast of burden—woman. There is the look of sad patience in every Egyptian woman's eyes as in the melancholy river boiling at its great task and in the face of the camel, the donkey, and the ox. They all look at you with the same expression of patience. They seem content to live, no matter what the conditions of their often wretched life—and not desirous of making change or resistance. The long swing of the camel, the measured stride of the ox or buffalo, the half-trot of the donkey, are seen everywhere. The woman's face is covered—at least her mouth is always—for no Mohammedan woman may expose her mouth to the vulgar gaze of passers-by. All have the same expression in their eyes as the camel or other animal.

If an active young man is very bright he cannot keep it dark.

It is all very well to have a clock on the stairs, but it is not at all desirable to have it run down and strike one.

BEARS AND WOLVES ON DARTMOOR.—It is interesting to note that references to the bear in England are made as late as A.D. 750, and the wolf only disappeared in the reign of Henry VII., whilst in Scotland it did not absolutely become extinct until the middle of the seventeenth century. It is said that the right to pasture on the moor, enjoyed by certain parishes contiguous thereto, was conferred in return for the obligation to destroy a certain number of wolves per annum. From the prevalence on Dartmoor of thumb-scrapers, i.e., flakes of flint so trimmed that they possess a semi-circular scraping edge, it is assumed that the inhabitants of the hut-circles wore skin clothing, which had been scraped and rendered supple by these flint implements. This is confirmed by the great scarcity of spindle-whorls, for thus far only a couple of examples have been found in the hut-circles, and a very few outside.

BEDLAM.—The Bedlam Asylum or Bethlem Hospital was originally the Convent of St. Mary of Bethlehem, which at the Reformation was assigned for the reception of lunatics. From the terrible condition in which the insane were kept in the sixteenth century, being chained to posts or left uncared for at all, it is very easy to see how the word "Bedlam" came to mean any violent disturbance and noise of tongues. The word "Bedlam" is a common abbreviation for Bethlehem, and this usage occurs as early as 1597. The obsolete word "Bedlamer" is used for a half-cured lunatic licensed to beg on the highway, and the old North-country word, "Bedlam Hole," a mad-house, seems clearly to point to the origin of the word. A village boys' game after the manner of Prisoners' Base is called locally "Bedlam," from the shouting and yells which are part of the play and form a "perfect Bedlam."

SAILOR'S CURIOUS PETS.—It has been said of the jackie sailor boy that he is so passionately fond of pets he must have something to love if it is "only a cockroach in a 'bacsy box." This statement was founded on fact, for one of the most remarkable pets of an English ship was a monstrous cockroach. He was four inches long and one inch broad. One of the sailors had tamed him and built for him a cage with a little kennel in the corner of it. This insect prodigy learned to recognise his master's voice, and when he heard him call would hurry out from his kennel in response. Among other odd pets that have been beloved by English sailors was a seal, who had a tank residence on board and a daily round of pleasure and duty; his pleasure seven meals a day, his duty a bath after each meal. Another was a deer who would take a quid of tobacco with so much delight that the fellow feeling aroused by his appreciative taste made him a general favourite.

HE THOUGHT HE COULD DRAW.—While travelling in Switzerland, the elder Dumas one day arrived in a lonely village with only one inn, at which the famous novelist was compelled to put up for the night. When the landlord, who only spoke German, came to inquire what he would take for supper, Dumas tried, but in vain, to make him understand that he wanted some mushrooms, and was on the point of giving up, with a bad grace, all hope of enjoying his favourite dish, when he hit upon the idea of taking a piece of charcoal and tracing on the wall what purported to be the correct outline of a mushroom. The landlord went out, and Dumas was congratulating himself on the success of his happy expedient, when a few moments afterwards he heard the Swiss coming up the stairs. The mushrooms could hardly have been prepared in so short a time, but this thought did not occur to our great novelist. The footsteps came nearer, there was a knock, and in walked the landlord—with an umbrella!

FOR LACK OF A HYPHEN.—One misplaced letter may cause an error in print, amusing or tragic, as the case may be. It was once stated in an account of a Grand Army reunion that over two thousand of the soldiers were compelled to sleep on cats, and the same article by dropping an "r" mentioned the battle scared veterans. The little, harmless looking hyphen, too, is a mighty factor at times. If you write your landlord that you wish to release his house when your time expires, you mean one thing; if you write him you desire to re-lease the premises you mean exactly the opposite. Mighty is the hyphen.

THE WONDERFUL FRIGATE BIRD.—The frigate bird far surpasses all others in its power of flight, inasmuch as, except at the breeding season, it seldom visits the land, and is never seen to swim or rest on the waters. A celebrated naturalist who spent several years in studying the habits of this and other birds, states that the frigate bird can live in the air for a week at a time, night and day, without once perching or resting. He found these birds able, with ease, to go one hundred miles an hour. The albatross has followed the course of a ship for several days without being known to take any rest. The swift is another bird which is almost continually on the wing, and never settles on the ground or on trees.

TEACHERS' TALES.—A teacher recently read to her young pupils an account of a man who had lived for some years upon the frontier. When the story was reproduced by one of the children, to her surprise it read that he had lived for some years "on his front ear!" Another teacher read that a gentleman had occupied for some time a fine country seat. Upon asking the children what was meant by a "country seat," a dead silence reigned till one little fellow said he thought he knew, and to the inquiry of the teacher replied, "A milking stool." Still another had been reading to her pupils about the rain. One, being asked to write a little story about the rain, after declaring his inability to do so, produced the following:—"What does the rain say to the dust? 'I am on to you, and your name is mud!'"

MAKING THE RAIN COME DOWN.—To find out if it were possible to force the skies to rain in dry weather, the United States Agricultural Department commissioned Mr. Myers, the balloon specialist, to go to Texas, during the hottest and driest season, and make some experiments with his balloons. Among other things a big balloon was raised to an elevation of a mile, and after being filled with oxygen and hydrogen, was exploded by electricity. The balloon was twelve feet in diameter and contained 900 cubic feet of mixed gas. For three days before there had not been the least indication of rain, and the skies were clear except for a few small white cloudlets. The explosion knocked a large building to the ground and killed hundreds of fishes in a neighbouring stream, but within a few minutes there came a terrific downpour of rain that pelted the earth for three-quarters of an hour.

HOW VANILLA IS GROWN.—It is grown in Mauritius on poles in partial shade in loam, mixed with equal parts of sand and leaf-mould. Cuttings of the stems from two feet to five feet long are planted and fastened to poles upon which they are to grow. The soil is kept moist. Thus started they readily take root and grow into flowering size in two or three years. The flowers require to be fertilised artificially. This is accomplished in exactly the same way as orchid flowers generally are fertilised. The fruits grow to full size in about a month after fertilisation, but they are not mature until they are about six months old. They then begin to change to a yellow colour, when they are gathered, placed in a basket and plunged for half a minute in hot water, and then exposed to the sun to dry. At night they are kept in a closed box. When they have become soft and brown they are dressed with oil and dried again.

ROYAL'S PROMISE

By FLORENCE HODGKINSON.

Author of "Ivy's Peril," "Guy Forrester's Secret," "Kenneth's Choice," etc., etc.

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

Sir Reginald Charteris lay dying, and anxiously awaits the arrival of his heir, Royal Charteris. Royal arrives in the nick of time, and the last words of his father crack a promise from him that the secret he then confides to him shall not be revealed without the consent of the person concerned.

Nell Fortescue is left an orphan at the early age of ten, and is adopted by her grandfather, Lord Delamere. Unhappily, his lordship lived but a short time to watch over his grandchild. In his will he left her an ample fortune when she should come of age, with an allowance for her use in the meantime. Little Nell is left in charge of Mrs. Delamere, and not realising her fortunate position, and not being over kindly treated, she determines to fit herself to earn her own living, and for this purpose enters the convent of St. Hilda's.

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN Nell came to herself she was lying on her own little bed at St. Hilda's, and the grave face of Sister Ida was watching near her, an unmistakable anxiety written on the usually unruffled brow.

Nell tried hard to think what had happened, and to understand how it came about that she was in bed when the bright summer day was so far advanced, and she knew the household must long since have been called together to prayers by the voice of the deep-toned chapel bell.

She remembered Sir Royal's visit to the Superior, and how she had caught a glimpse of her hero.

Later on Nell knew she had gone into the gardens to finish a sketch she was making for Marion's birthday. What had happened then? As in a dream it all came back to her—the appearance of a shabby and rather disreputable stranger, and then of another person talking to him. Nell knew by instinct they had been quarrelling, and that it was no light matter which divided them. Once or twice she had thought of running to the house and begging Sister Ida to send someone to part them, but St. Hilda's boasted no male retainers except a venerable gardener, long since returned to his cottage; and so Nell stayed where she was, as one enchained to the spot by some nameless fascination almost against her will.

She heard the report of the pistol; she saw the shabby stranger fall to the ground, but that was not what robbed her of consciousness. As his assailant turned to fly she caught a moment's sight of his face; and, though marred by evil passions, though darkened by fury, it seemed to Nell it was the same face which she had seen stately, noble, and courteous in Sister Ida's parlour. That was too much. The sight of her hero with Cain's guilt upon his brow was more than Nell could bear; she fell to the ground, and knew nothing more until she found herself in bed with the Superior herself watching her.

"It cannot be true!" thought poor little Nell to herself. "He could not have done it! I am sure of it!"

Sister Ida saw the large, soft brown eyes open, and noticed the troubled look on Nell's face, then she came forward and kissed the girl's hot, feverish brow.

"You are better now, dear. Do you know you have frightened us all sadly?"

"Have I been ill?"

"You fainted in the garden last night. I suppose the heat upset you—you had been looking pale all day!"

She waited with trembling earnestness for the answer. Head of a Sisterhood, bound to a lonely life, she might be, but she was still a woman.

The news of last night's terrible tragedy had reached her, and the report that sus-

picious of the murderer were directed towards the only man she ever loved. She knew in her heart that Nell must have seen something of the dark deed. If she had seen the perpetrator, and could swear he was a stranger, Sir Royal was safe. But Sister Ida had yet another hope. Nell might have fainted on hearing the report of the pistol, and have no recollection of either the murderer or his victim.

"It was not the heat."

Sister Ida's hopes faded; she looked at Nell's face. Pale, trembling, but yet earnest and resolute, and, without asking a single question, she knew that this child held Royal's fate between her hands. She bent over Nell, and took her hand tenderly as she said:—

"Then you saw it?"

It was not a question, but an assertion of a fact, and as such Nell answered it.

"I saw it all."

Sister Ida's eyes looked the question her lips could not frame, and Nell sobbed out:—

"It can't be true, Sister! I am sure it can't!"

"But did you see him?"

"I saw someone like him, but the face was distorted by rage. I can't tell you how it looked. It was an evil face, which frightened me, Sister Ida. Sir Royal Charteris could not look like that!"

Sister Ida well-nigh broke down. The love which, meeting with no return, she had striven to crush out, the love she had, she believed, conquered when she took the black veil, rose strong and warm within her. She thought of Royal Charteris as she had known him, boy and man, and she felt that nothing but his own word could convict him in her eyes of such a crime. For the first time in all the months she had known her Nell saw the tears course each other down the Superior's pale cheeks. A common grief seemed to unite them. Nell forgot all else; she clung to Sister Ida as though they had been girls together.

"He did not do it," she said, simply, "and nothing can harm the innocent."

"He is innocent," returned the Superior, with that sublime faith I think only women know; "but we shall not be able to prove it."

"But if he denies it?"

"Denies it," scornfully. "Child, you don't suppose that will do any good. They will accuse him of it. The servants will be made to confess that not two hours before he hunted this man from the Hall with anger such as they had never seen him use, even threatening the man with bodily harm if he was again seen on the premises. Then it seems he declines to account for his time on that fatal evening. What can his enemies want more? Besides, it will get about that you witnessed the catastrophe. They may drag you to a court of law, Nell, and make you swear away his life."

"I would not do it!"

The Superior sighed.

"You must appear if you are sent for; you must answer the questions put to you! You cannot deny the man who shot this Mr. Wharton bore a marked resemblance to Sir Royal Charteris."

Nell shivered as one stricken with a deadly cold, despite the sweet July sunshine which filled the little room.

It was barely a month since, on this very spot, she and her friends had tried their fortune. Surely there must have been something in Irish Leigh's predictions after all, for here was a life in danger—in danger through her word; only, think as she would, poor Nell could see no way of saving it.

But the business of daily life must go on as usual, in spite of aching hearts. Sister Ida was obliged to go away and take up her interrupted

duties. She laid her commands on Nell not to attempt to rise.

But, obedient and docile as the girl was usually, this was beyond her. She could not bear to be laid aside, or be shut out from hearing how things were going at Marton Hall; and so when the Sister was fairly gone, Nell rose and slowly dressed herself, only her trembling fingers would hardly perform their task; and as soon as she had fastened the plain close-fitting black frock and put on the little white cap which formed the uniform of the St. Hilda's workers, a deadly faintness crept over her again, and before she knew what it meant she had fallen back on her bed in another faint.

Meanwhile, Dr. White, for whom Sister Ida had sent, arrived, and was closeted with her—a kind old man, well over sixty, who had been at school both with Sir Reginald Charteris and Mr. Blake, who had seen his old comrades marry, and watched their children grow up. It had been a terrible grief to him when Ida Blake bound herself to a lonely life, for he had always cherished the hope of seeing her Lady Charteris. Later on came Ralph's death, and Sir Reginald's strange aversion to the sight of his own species—an aversion which extended even to old friends like the doctor—so that for the last two years of the Baronet's life Dr. White never entered Marton Hall until he was sent for professionally, too late to be of any use.

The kindly old doctor bore no malice. When Sir Reginald sent for him he gave him his best skill as willingly as though that blank had not come in their intercourse. He was most assiduous in his attentions, even sitting up a whole night with his old friend when Mrs. Carter was worn out, and Sir Reginald refused to have a stranger.

Dr. White was the only representative of his profession at Marton, and when Ward and Giles gave the alarm after their painful discovery, the one policeman of the village sent to the doctor, as though he really believed him able to restore the dead to life.

Dr. White gave one look at Mr. Wharton, and pronounced life extinct. He also identified him as John Dalrymple, a sometime friend and boon companion of the late Ralph Charteris.

Only when he said this did he notice the trouble on the servants' faces. Only when he had uttered this statement did a certain Farmer Brown, who was not a servant of the family, and had once had differences with Ralph, declare that Sir Royal Charteris must be the murderer!

"Nonsense!" said the doctor, hotly. "A pretty thing indeed, if a gentleman is held answerable for the life of anyone who likes to commit suicide on his grounds!"

"Look here, doctor!" said Brown, coolly. "It's no case of suicide. That man wasn't the kind of creature to take his own life: besides, if he did, the pistol would be lying near!"

"The ground has not been searched!"

Brown shook his head.

"This man came to Marton with the open intention of seeing Sir Royal; he said as much to me and other folks!"

"He did see him!" said Giles, in spite of a warning glance from his father. "He and the master were together nigh on half an hour. Farmer Brown, Sir Royal's not the gentleman to refuse to listen to anyone who wants to see him!"

"And they parted on such friendly terms," said Brown, spitefully. "Mr. Wharton was chased off the premises, for I met him, and he told me so!"

Dr. White felt a strange pang of fear. He left the knot of gossipers where they stood, and hurried to the hall. Come what might, he would see Sir Royal, and tell him of the awful suspicion which had gained a hearing. He knew the ways of the house pretty well, and expected to find the Baronet in his study. There being no servants about, he made his



"FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE BE CAREFUL, ROYAL, THEY ARE SAYING—YOU KILLED JOHN DALRYMPLE," SAID DR. WHITE.

way unannounced. Sir Royal was sitting in a low chair, reading, a favourite dog at his feet. He looked both sad and weary, but not in the least like a man who has committed a murder.

Dr. White breathed again, not that he had ever a suspicion of Royal; only to see the young man sitting there so calm and composed was in itself a refutation of the cruel slander he had heard.

"Why, doctor," said Royal, hospitably, "you are a late visitor! I am very glad to see you, but it must be something startling which has brought you here at this hour. It must be hard on ten!"

"It is something terrible," said the kind old man, who found his task all the harder, from the utter unconsciousness of his young friend.

"Anything I can help you in?" asked Royal, kindly. "Why, I believe you are actually trembling!"

"I feel as if I had the ague! What have you been doing to-night, Royal?"

"Strolling in the grounds. I have not long come in! It is pleasant out of doors such evenings as this!"

"Bless me, how unfortunate; but, of course, someone was with you?"

"Why unfortunate?" demanded Royal, "and why should anyone be with me? I am not in my dotage! I don't require a keeper!"

"Then you haven't heard. You didn't go down by the river opposite St. Hilda's?"

"I have heard nothing. You don't mean there has been an accident, and one of Ida Blake's charity children been drowned? It struck me the other day as a thing very likely to happen!"

"It's worse than that! A man has been murdered, Sir Royal! Shot to death in cold blood here in your grounds!"

He had no cause to think the Baronet apathetic now. Royal started up, a dull, red

streak dyeing his cheeks, even through their sunburnt hue. It struck Dr. White with a pang that he did not seem so much amazed as horrified.

"You are sure that he is dead? Can nothing be done? No money should be spared!"

"My good fellow," said the doctor, a little strangely, "money may do many things, but it can't restore the dead to life. This man was perfectly dead when I was called to him more than an hour ago!"

The look of pain on Sir Royal's face deepened. He locked his hands together nervously as a woman might have done.

"This is a terrible business!"

"You don't ask who the victim is!"

"You told me, didn't you, that it was the stranger staying at the Charteris Arms?"

"I did not tell you! It is the man staying at the inn. I knew him at once as John Dalrymple, a friend of poor Ralph's, and I really believe as great a scoundrel as ever breathed!"

"He was passing under the name of Wharton," said the Baronet. "He came up here to-day and ventured to demand money of me."

"On what grounds?"

"Hush—money, I suppose is the correct term. He knows there are plenty of things in poor Ralph's life I shouldn't care to have published to the world at large, and so he requested me to buy his silence."

"And you refused?"

"I did more than that. I lost my temper, and should have taken a riding-whip to him had not the servants put him out of the house by main force."

"I wish you hadn't."

"Why?" demanded Sir Royal, haughtily; "he deserved it most thoroughly. Are you one of those who, the moment a man is dead, forget his bad deeds, and remember only his virtues? I tell you Dalrymple was a scoundrel,

and he deserved a good deal more than I gave him."

"Hush!" implored the doctor. "Remember he is dead. Oh, Sir Royal, be cautious."

"Why?" inquired Royal, simply; "I'm not afraid of you repeating what I say to his friends—if he had any."

Dr. White was forced to come to the point.

"For Heaven's sake be careful. I don't know how to tell you, Royal, but they are saying—you did it."

Royal stared wildly around him, as though he could not grasp the meaning of the words.

"That I did it! That I killed John Dalrymple, a man I despised so utterly! I could not demean myself by horsewhipping him, but had him hunted out of the house as some loathsome animal! That I killed him! What next!"

"I knew you didn't do it," said the doctor, joyously; "I would have staked my life on it." But the broken sob which half choked the old man's voice told Royal the matter was more serious than he had fancied.

"I know you would not doubt me," he replied, warmly; "but can you possibly mean that anyone believes this absurd story against me!"

"I fear so!"

"You had better tell me all," pleaded Sir Royal; "it will prevent my hearing it first from less friendly lips. Indeed, I would rather you spoke freely."

"It's Farmer Brown who started it. He said he knew the man Wharton (he called him) was staying at Marton on purpose to see you, and that when he met him coming back from the Hall he declared you had threatened to break every bone in his body if he came there again. Brown appealed to the servants to know if he had not been turned out of the house."

Sir Royal grew grave.

"I can't deny using those words, and, though I know the servants are loyal, they must admit that I ordered the man to be expelled like a vagrant. But surely they can't go on just this?"

"The murder was committed close to the river where it is narrowest; the report of the pistol was heard distinctly by several. Your butler admits he reached the spot in time to see a man making off, but he swears he did not recognise him."

"I don't know what man could be near that part of the grounds," said Sir Royal, thoughtfully. "It is my own favourite haunt because of the pavilion near it; and, as I hate to meet strangers in the grounds, I have refused all applications for leave to fish in that part of the river."

"I suppose if it comes to the worst you could account for all your time this evening? Forgive me for suggesting it, but it might become necessary."

Royal shook his head.

"What time was the shot fired?"

"Soon after eight."

"I went out at half-past seven, and I did not come in till nine. That hour and a-half I was strolling in the grounds, and I never exchanged a word with anyone except a gipsy girl I saw through the hedge. She wanted to tell my fortune and I refused, and tossed her a shilling instead. I doubt if a court of law would take a gipsy's word as an alibi. Besides, the girl was evidently on some tramp, and might be difficult to find."

"I don't like it, Sir Royal!"

"Do you mean you doubt me?"

"I would as soon doubt myself; but, my boy," said the old man, forgetting all ceremony in his eagerness, "don't you see yourself that every word you have told me would only confirm the story to prejudiced ears?"

"I suppose so."

"The great point in your favour is that no one saw the murderer!"

Sir Royal looked up abruptly.

"I should have said that was the worst part of it. If anyone had caught even a glimpse of the murderer it would prove at once that I must be innocent."

Dr. White looked at him strangely.

"Have you no suspicion, then, of who really killed John Dalrymple?"

"Not the slightest."

"I have."

"Whom do you suspect?"

Sir Royal was strangely pale. The veins in his temple stood out like thick purple cords; he seemed literally to hang upon the doctor's words, and the old man was in no hurry to speak. He looked strangely troubled. Once he began, and broke off again; at last he said slowly:

"I was up very late last night, and as I went home in the lane near the park I met a tramp."

"There are many about at this time of year," returned Sir Royal, coolly.

"Aye, but not like this man. He seemed to have been a gentleman, and there was something strangely familiar to me in his walk and bearing. Royal, despite his ragged clothes, he reminded me of you."

"Fortunately, vanity is not my failing, or I might not relish the implied resemblance."

The doctor did not heed the interruption.

"I should not have mentioned it but for this terrible murder. The tramp stalked on in front of me for a long while. I was just thinking of speaking and asking his business when he turned round, clambered over a low fence, and got into the park grounds."

"A poacher, probably."

"I do not think it was a poacher," persisted Dr. White. "And I believe, poacher or not, that man was John Dalrymple's murderer!"

"Then let us hope, for his own sake, he is no longer prowling about my grounds."

Dr. White looked at the young man wistfully—evidently he felt disappointed.

"Royal, I was your father's friend, I have known you from your birth—can't you trust me?"

"I would trust you with my life!" returned the young Baronet, in a voice of deep emotion. "I would take your advice before any other. In proof of it, I ask you what shall I do in the matter? Will it be wiser to keep perfectly quiet until I am publicly accused of the crime, or shall I protest my innocence, and offer a handsome reward for the arrest of the real murderer?"

"The real murderer was the poacher."

"Then he will escape. Poachers are generally clever fellows, I believe?"

"Royal!"

Sir Royal felt the piteous appeal in that one word. He took his old friend's hand, and held it in his own.

"I am innocent of this crime, Dr. White," he said, firmly. "And you who have known me from childhood, believe it. If I know this, if my conscience acquits me of all blame, what does it matter if strangers make busy with my name, and credit me with murder?"

"It matters much."

"How? I have no relations. Since my father's death I have foreseen my life must be a lonely one. There is no human creature to care deeply whether my name is honoured or maligned!"

"I think you are beside yourself," cried Dr. White. "Don't you see it is not a mere question of praise or blame? If you don't prove yourself innocent of Dalrymple's death the law of England will demand your life for his!"

"Well—"

"I am ashamed of you! Life may not be so fair to you as men believe it, but is there not something cowardly in giving it up for an offence you never committed? You have duties—as the head of a grand old race may depend on you. Pray, what would become of your tenants? Into whose hands would their interests fall? Who would maintain the honour of the Charteris' if you throw away your life like this?"

He had touched the right chord now. Royal recollected his promise to his father—that fatal promise which in one short month had borne such terrible fruit! For the sake of that pledge he must indeed, if possible, preserve both life and liberty.

"You are right," he said, slowly. "It would be cowardly to welcome death because life holds no great charms. What would you advise me to do?—though, remember, I believe you greatly overrate the danger."

"My advice is very simple. Keep quiet, and see no one until I return to you to-morrow."

"But what shall you do?"

"Find out, if possible, whether anyone exists who actually saw the murder!"

"And then—"

"I cannot tell. If I am right and the crime was committed by the tramp—"

"The poacher!" interrupted Royal.

"The poacher, then. I fear whoever saw him must have remarked his resemblance to you; but I am still hoping no one witnessed the fatal shot. If that is so, I believe there is no fear of actual danger to you, only—"

"Only my name will be shadowed always. Only I shall be like a prisoner against whom has been returned the old Scottish verdict of 'Not proven.' Dr. White, you may well say it would be cowardly to die, for death would be preferable ten thousand times to the fate you so calmly contemplate for me."

"Not calmly, Royal! If you would let me act I should do far differently."

"How?"

"I should scour the country through for the poacher. I would not let your fair name—maybe your life—be sacrificed to his."

Far into the night did the two friends stay talking; and, when the doctor left the Hall, he took Sir Royal's promise—to do nothing in the matter until he returned with whatever tidings he had been able to collect.

Alas! the new day opened badly. The case had been stated to the Blakesleigh authorities with considerable bitterness by Farmer Brown; but, as yet, the magistrate there refused to issue a warrant for Sir Royal's apprehension. He declared he would not stir in the matter without positive proof of something beyond mere suspicion.

Dr. White drove home from hearing this to find Sister Ida's note awaiting him; merely a line begging him to come that morning to St. Hilda's, as she desired to see him on urgent business.

Dr. White pondered over that note as he walked up to the Home. A keen-sighted man where his friends were concerned, he was well aware that Ida Blake in the years gone by had given her childish love to Royal Charteris. Had the old love prompted her to long for a true version of the cruel reports going abroad? Or had the woman been lost in the Superior, and she had sent for him on account of the bodily illness of one of her flock? Or—this last idea troubled the kind old man, as the spot where the murder took place was only separated by a narrow stream from her grounds—was it possible that she herself or one of the other Sisters had witnessed the catastrophe?

"Heaven help them both if that is it," mused poor Dr. White; "for I believe, then, nothing could save his life; and, though Ida has left the world, and professes to have renounced all earthly affections, I believe it would break her heart if it was her voice sent him to a violent death."

A shadow lay over St. Hilda's, despite the bright July sunshine. The little industrialists who were wont to welcome the doctor with great enthusiasm, since many a packet of sweets had passed from his pocket to their ready hands, looked grave and sad. Sister Eunice, who, herself, opened the door, had tears in her eyes; but then that was natural, considering her old friendship with Charteris.

"Oh, doctor," said the old lady, imploringly; "do try to save her; she is so young to die!"

"Do you mean that Sister Ida (the religious name always came with a jerk from the doctor's lips, for he was an old-fashioned man and had no patience with what he called new-fangled notions) is dangerously ill?" cried the bewildered doctor.

"Oh, no, Sister is quite well. It's Miss Fortescue! She was brought home in a dead faint last night. Sister sat up for her, and now she says Nell is too ill to see any of us; and, doctor, I think she must be dying, for the Superior was crying, and I've never seen her shed a tear before."

She had solved the problem. In the doctor's mind he knew now perfectly all that Sister Ida had meant in sending for him. The Superior received him in her own room, and when the door closed on them she never spoke of Miss Fortescue. She looked into the old man's eyes with a glance of piteous entreaty, and just gasped out:

"Tell me. You have seen him!"

"Yes."

"He is innocent; I know it." She pressed her hand to her heart. "I feel it; something here tells me Royal Charteris cannot be guilty; and yet, what I have heard, is terribly against him."

"He is innocent."

"I knew it."

"But," said the doctor, gravely, "his innocence, even now, is hard to prove. It will be, I fear, well-nigh impossible, if anyone witnessed the murder, and their description of the murderer at all applies to Royal."

"Can they force anyone to be a witness?"

"Yes."

"And to answer questions?"

"I fear so."

"She is very ill," breathed Sister Ida. "Could you not give us a certificate—her health would not suffer her to attend?"

"It would not avail; they would only postpone the trial. Will you let me see her?"

They stood together by Nell's bed, and looked on the girl's fair, innocent face, beautiful even in its unconsciousness.

Marion Delamere had been right when she told her cousin life at St. Hilda's had improved her looks but, in calling Nell "pretty" she did not go far enough. The old doctor thought he had never seen a lovelier face, as he stood there and looked on the girl whom he feared must seal Royal's doom.

Nell stirred uneasily; a moment more, and she sat up, opening her soft, brown eyes, and turning them pleadingly on the Sister.

"I could not help it," she said, simply. "I know you told me not to get up, but I could not bear to be lying there, not knowing what was happening."

"Nothing has happened," said Sister Ida, gently; "only you have fainted again. I do not wonder. What you saw last night was enough to try stronger nerves than yours."

"You must try not to think of it," said Dr. White, kindly; "you must, indeed."

She raised her beautiful eyes to his face.

"Will you tell me who did it?"

"I cannot."

"It was not Sir Royal Charteris?"

"My dear child, I have known him, boy and man, for thirty years, and I would stake my life upon his innocence."

"I know," breathed Nell, simply. "Besides, though it was like him, Sir Royal would not look like that! Dr. White, I never saw such a terrible face; it was like an evil spirit's."

"I wish you had not been there, Miss Fortescue," said the doctor, earnestly. "I do, indeed. It was a most terrible experience for you, and, I fear, may seriously affect Sir Royal's prospects."

"Do you think I would speak of it?" breathed Nell, indignantly. "I told Sister Ida, but I will never tell anyone else. I know that people would think I saw Sir Royal there; I should think so myself if I did not know his face could not look like that."

"My poor child, I know you would keep silence, but the law may command you to speak. Miss Fortescue, if you are summoned as a witness against Royal Charteris, I fear nothing will save his life."

Nell turned to Sister Ida.

"Couldn't you hide me somewhere," she asked, gravely, "till the trial was over? I have never been anywhere alone in my life, but I would not mind going to save Sir Royal."

Dr. White looked at her intently. She was almost a child in years, beautiful and innocent, pure and true. A tear came into his eye as it flashed on him like a sudden inspiration the only way in which little Nell could save his friend's life.

"We could not hide you," he answered, gravely. "The law would have power to search for you anywhere, and send you back; besides, your parents might be against your generous sacrifice."

"I am an orphan," said Nell, quietly, "and I have no brothers or sisters. My aunt and cousins are in Switzerland, but they would not mind. I was never anything to them but a little dependent they could have gladly spared. I never was happy since mamma died until I came here to Sister Ida."

The doctor tried hard to meet the Superior's eyes, but she fixed them on the ground. He felt certain the same idea had come to her which filled his thoughts. Would she approve of it, or would that old love of long ago make her oppose it? He longed to know.

"Were you going to live here always, Miss Fortescue? Had your relatives quite made a present of you to St. Hilda's?"

It was the Superior who answered, still without looking up.

"Nell was only lent to me for two years, and I have to give her up on the first of next September. I own I once hoped she would take the veil, but her aunt was much opposed to the idea, and made me promise Nell should never be persuaded to become one of us. Of

late I have had several letters, warning me not to encourage any prejudice of hers in favour of a Sister's life, as it is her aunt's intention to take her into society, and establish her in marriage."

"Ah," said the doctor, meaningly. "Then turning to Nell, 'And have you ever seen anyone you would like to marry?'"

Nell shook her head.

"I shall never marry," she said, simply. "Nothing would make me fashionable and witty. Aunt Agnes may take me into society, but it will be of no use."

"You said just now you would not mind hiding yourself for Sir Royal's sake. Miss Fortescue, I must speak plainly; I have no time for ceremony. There is only one way in which you can be prevented from bearing testimony against him. It may seem too terrible a sacrifice, but, for his sake, I must tell you of it."

"Yes, tell me!" said Nell, bravely; "be sure I will do it if I can."

"Even the law of England cannot compel a wife to give evidence against her husband. Marry Sir Royal Charteris, and you will save his life!"

"Never!" was Sir Royal's reply, when Dr. White carried the suggestion to him. "Marry a woman I have never seen, in order to save my life! I would rather die!"

"If you persist in refusing this chance you will have your wish!" said Dr. White, sternly.

"The question to me is, have you a right to sacrifice your own life and blight another's to gratify your pride?"

"Another's!"

"Miss Fortescue is but nineteen, a gentle, sensitive, tender-hearted creature. What do you think life will be worth to her if she knows her words have condemned a fellow-creature to die for a crime of which he is innocent?"

"No doubt she thinks me guilty."

"She does not. She says the man was very like you; but that your face could never have looked so terrible!"

"Then she has seen you?"

"I believe so!"

"I never meant to marry! And what can a wife be like who agrees to marry a man half the world will believe guilty of murder, just to share his title and to escape from a distasteful vocation!"

"You wrong her cruelly. To begin with, she has no ambition. She is incapable of it; then she is not destined to take the veil."

"Why does she consent?"

"I should say from simple pity!"

"Rubbish! You mean she thinks it must be pleasant to be called my lady, and to be married!"

Dr. White grew indignant.

"You must make your choice. I can't force you to save your life; but you shall not force evil of her. I have been to London for a special license. If you consent the ceremony can be performed this evening in the Sisters' chapel!"

"So soon?"

"It must be to avail. I hear, on good authority, a warrant for your apprehension will be issued to-morrow. It may have already been granted!"

"I would far rather face the worst that can happen!"

"Which course would your father have advised? Sir Royal, I can say no more. I am going into the grounds; if you do not join me in ten minutes I shall consider your refusal final!"

But the allusion to Sir Reginald had worked like a spell. Royal rose, and linked his arm in the doctor's.

"I consent! I will come with you now! You are sure the girl consents?"

"Yes!"

"And she understands it is simply to ensure

my life. She won't expect me to play the part of an eager lover?"

Dr. White frowned.

"She will not!" Then rather bitterly, "I see no need for you to meet before the ceremony!"

Sir Royal breathed a sigh of relief.

Sister Ida herself admitted them.

"All is ready," she said quietly. "I judged it best. Delay might peril all."

Sir Royal took her hand.

"Do you advise this, Ida? Don't you think it a cowardly expedient?"

"It is a sacrifice," said Sister Ida, calmly, "which I deem a duty for you both."

The Vicar of Marton stood at the altar of the chapel in his surplice. He often held services for the Sisters, and was, indeed, always summoned to their aid when the Bishop was away. He shook hands in perfect silence with Sir Royal; then Sister Ida, who had left them, returned with two girls—Phyllis Ward, whom Nell had begged might be with her in this crisis of her life, and a slight figure, whose face was completely hidden by a heavy lace veil which fell almost to the bottom of her plain black dress. It was Sister Ida's own veil which she had worn at her profession as a Sister of Mercy. She little thought then it would ever cover the tresses of Sir Royal's wife!

(To be continued next week.)

This story commenced in No. 2,043. Back numbers can be obtained through all News-agents.

USEFUL HINTS.

To remove iron-mould: Rub the spot with a little salts of lemon; let it remain a few moments, and well rinse in clear water.

A pleasant hair-wash: One ounce of borax, half an ounce of camphor finely powdered together, dissolved in one quart of boiling water; when cool, the solution will be ready for use. It cleanses and strengthens the hair, and must be rubbed well into the roots. A little brillian-tine should be used afterwards.

An old cure for blistered feet: Rub the feet when going to bed with spirits mixed with tallow (not wax) dropped from a lighted candle into the palm of the hand.

To preserve the colour of pearls: Shut them up with a piece of ash tree root. To brighten diamonds: Shake them up in a bag of bran.

To wash gold and gems: Brush them with a soft bush dipped in soap, rinse, and put in boxwood sawdust till dry.

To wash silver: Rub with a slice of lemon and rinse in cold water, then wash with soap and hot water. Dry, and polish with chamois.

It is said that claret stains may be removed by sherry gently rubbed over them.

INCONSISTENT MAN.

He tells funny stories about how a woman drives a horse and steers his motor-car up a telegraph pole.

He is above adding postscripts to his letters, but he uses the long-distance telephone to explain what he omitted in his business communication.

He can explain the wireless telegraphy system to his wife, but he cannot understand her description of a new bonnet.

He picks flaws in the lectures of eminent scientists and discovers monumental wisdom in the lisps of his baby.

He loves to tell of the splendid exercise of sawing wood, but he is willing to pay another man to enjoy the exercise.

He writes cards to the papers against problem plays, and swears at the box-office window if he cannot get a front seat for the new ballet.

He doesn't go to church on Sunday because he wants to read the paper, but through the week he is satisfied to glance at the headline on his way to the office.

EDEN'S SACRIFICE

CHAPTER XXIII. (Continued.)

She turned to Eden, half startled. "What is it?" she asked. "I don't seem to understand. I feel as though I were strangling."

"The day is excessively warm," Eden answered, in a trembling voice, passing her hand across her damp brow. "Have—have you lived here long?"

"No. I have been married but three months, and—and— Oh, Mrs. Gordon, I wonder if I could trust you? I want a friend—I need a friend so. I seem so bitterly alone. I—I don't know what I am saying. You must forgive me and forget it."

Eden took the cold hands in hers and kissed the woman's brow.

"Don't ask me to forgive or forget," she said, gently. "I have suffered."

There were such volumes in the short sentence that Doris shuddered. She grasped the small hands, and the two sat together upon a sofa.

"What does it mean?" she cried, sharply. "Why are you and I shut up here like two hermits? Why has no woman's form ever shadowed that door? Why are the men who come to visit my husband and yours creatures who are a disgrace to any household? Oh, what is it? I am afraid—so afraid that the constant strain is killing me. I have loved my husband Heaven knows how well, but I am growing to fear him. I dare not speak to him; I dare not question him. Oh, what is it—what is it?"

Eden rose.

She stood with her hands clasped loosely before her, her head raised as though the compressed air in her lungs had not room to escape. Her face was motionless as marble. She seemed more like a silver statue under moonlight, as a soft ray from the declining sun crept through the curtain and touched her brow.

Could she tell that suffering woman that her husband was a thief?

Horrible! She shivered at the bare contemplation. What was she to say?

She knelt beside Doris Browne, and took the cold hands in her own again.

"My dear," she said gently, "there are some truths that we should not probe, some circumstances that we should not reflect upon. If you love your husband, for Heaven's sake retain it! What is all the world compared with love? Nothing—nothing! Forget every other good or ill, and keep only that. It is the Heaven in existence."

"You love your husband, then?"

The chill of death came upon Eden; her face grew grey and sleepy with horror.

She staggered to her feet. A cry of anguished negation was upon her lips, but a quick knock sounded upon the door, and the next instant Gordon was beside her.

He glanced from one to the other quickly, then said, quietly:—

"I was surprised to see you, Doris, but it was kind of you to come in my absence to cheer my wife. Eden, the letter you expected has arrived at last."

She turned even paler, and Gordon threw his arm about her to prevent her falling.

She did not shrink from him, but seemed unaware of his presence.

Doris Browne arose.

"You are going?" inquired Eden, hoarsely.

"Yea."

"But you will come again? Promise me that. Oh, I am so lonely, so friendless, so unhappy! You will come again, will you not?"

"I will come."

That was all.

Then Eden was alone with Gordon.

"You did not tell her—" began Gordon, anxiously.

"I told her nothing. One cannot tell a woman, a poor miserable wretch, that her husband is a thief—the thing to be most abhorred by all the world. Will you give me my letter?"

He placed it in her hand silently, the seal unbroken.

The well-known writing, the dainty seal, were plainly seen; then vision seemed to desert her.

She turned blind, put out her hand and groped in darkness for a chair.

She held the letter against her heart for many minutes, but no sight returned—not an object in the room was visible.

"It has been too much—too much!" she cried, miserably. "I have gone blind!"

Gordon was beside her in a moment, gazing anxiously into the dilated pupils.

"You will recover soon," he said, tenderly.

"Oh, Eden! Eden!"

She put the letter into his hand, helplessly.

"Read it to me!" she exclaimed, piteously.

"I cannot see even you—not even you!"

He broke the seal, knowing that it was but the shock that affected her; and sitting as near her as he dared, he read:—

"Oh, child, child, why have you done this? Don't you know that my love was so great that I would have forgiven anything—anything? Eden, why did you not, why will you not, trust me? My darling, come back, or tell me where I can see you! The woman of whom you wrote has left the house, and the necklace is in my mother's hands."

"Eden, if you have any pity, you will at least let me see you. I know that some terrible secret took you from me. Will you not trust me? If you desire my friendship, and not my love, it is yours, though my heart must be strangled; but if you will have my love, darling, darling, my heart and soul are in your hands. Nothing can make any difference to me. Won't you understand? Nothing—nothing! At least let me see you. Staunch and loyal always, I am for ever and only yours,

"WALTER MARCHMONT."

Gordon's voice ceased. Great drops of perspiration stood upon his brow, but the tone had never faltered.

He folded the letter and handed it to her.

She was so still that he fancied she had fainted; but as his hand touched hers she shivered and arose slowly, as though the effort were painful.

"Sir Wilfred," she whispered, through her dry, parched lips, "you have kept your word. I am ready to keep mine."

Gordon's head sank upon his breast. For a moment he was tempted to tell her all—to meet sacrifice with honour and give her back her word.

He lifted his head to speak, but all the madness of his passionate adoration, the insanity of his headlong idolatry, rushed over him as his eyes fell upon her. He tottered to his feet.

"Come!" he gasped.

Five minutes later they were seated in a carriage, being driven to the registrar's office.

Poor Eden! And the sacrifice was so useless!

CHAPTER XXIV.

The woman who stood beside Wilfred Gordon in the little dark parlour of the registrar's house was very little like the girl who promised to "love, honour and obey" Herbert Staunton only one short year before.

She stood erect and still, her cold lips curved into an expression of scorn, her eyes brilliant with repressed contempt.

Recent sorrow, perhaps the most cutting she had ever known, was converting Eden into a cynic.

She listened to the words, and recalled a

former scene—the one in which she had taken a leading part.

The memory came to her of how frightened she had been when she suddenly recalled how little she knew of Herbert Staunton's past, and of how she afterwards grew to love him in spite of all.

Then a thought came to her:

"Can I learn to love this man like that, knowing him to be a thief?"

A sneer that was positively repulsive darkened her features, but she listened on.

The solemn words were robbed of meaning; they seemed pitiless and cold.

Wilfred Gordon's face was like that of a saint. It seemed devoid of every expression save purity, reverence and love.

His head was raised, and he listened with a slight flush on either cheek that made him almost beautiful.

He forgot that he was committing an act of infinite dishonour—forgot everything save his love for her beside him, and he made his responses in a voice which startled her, so full was it of devotion.

She signed her name upon the register with a hand that did not tremble—Eden Carlton—while Gordon watched her curiously.

Another moment and they were gone, seated in the carriage that had brought them.

Gordon was strangely silent. Once or twice he endeavoured to break the oppressive silence that rested upon them, but his tongue seemed thick and dry, and incapable of articulation.

"Eden," he stammered, at last, "I wonder if you will ever forgive me for loving you too well?"

"Never, Sir Wilfred," she answered, with unhesitating coldness.

He groaned slightly, but tried to speak quietly.

"I wish you would please not call me 'Sir' Wilfred. Mrs. Bruce knows me simply as Wilfred Gordon. If you would call me Wilfred I should not presume upon it in any way."

"As you will," haughtily.

"And, Eden, I have another request to make. May I trust you to tell Mrs. Bruce nothing of what you suspect her husband's occupation to be? He loves her—and—he would shield her from the shock of knowing, if he can."

Eden shuddered.

"I shall not tell her, but I must also request that you take me away from there as soon as possible. I cannot willingly live under the same roof with an active thief."

Gordon bit his lips, but remained silent. Her sneers were like arrow thrusts.

The remainder of the drive was completed in silence—a stony silence, under which only Heaven could have known how Eden was suffering.

Again she entered the lovely suite, that was like a fairy palace in design and delicate colouring, but there was no beauty in it to her. Every hope seemed gone, and life was something to be lived to avoid the sin of ending it.

She sat down with her hat still on, and looked about her helplessly.

There was absolutely nothing in it all—nothing in life, but to wait for death!

She was so ghastly that Gordon poured a glass of wine from a decanter and held it to her lips.

She drained it.

He removed her hat and gloves, and she allowed it in silence.

Her lips were beginning to quiver, and her breathing came spasmodically.

He lifted her in his arms and laid her on a sofa, bathing her face and head with water.

She seemed to be for a time unaware of the fact of his being near her, but when she realised it she pushed him from her and sat up, her eyes brilliant in their excitement.

"Go away!" she sobbed. "Can't you see how your presence fills me with loathing? Won't you see how I utterly despise you? Do you think that I could feel the touch of your fingers upon my face without remembering that if a

diamond rested upon my bosom those fingers would strangle me for its possession?"

"Eden!"

The cry of pain and shame was horrible, but she did not even hear.

"I tell you that your presence stifles me. I cannot breathe the same air that surrounds you. It poisons me. Why don't you go away? I loathe you! I abhor you! Oh, go, go! Your presence, the sight of your detested face, is driving me mad."

"Eden!"

"Don't stand staring at me in that hideous way. Can't you understand me that Satan, fresh from perdition, would be welcome in your place? At least he is not a thief. Go, I beseech you!"

Gordon turned and went.

The look he gave her was like nothing human. His countenance looked like the harmless animal that has received its death-wound and prays mutely to its slayer for pity. It was like the last, wistful pleading of the lost soul, mercilessly turned from the gates of Heaven.

When the door closed upon him Eden gasped.

The expression had remained. It seemed to settle over her like the murky atmosphere that precedes a storm. In every corner of the room she saw it. Evening shadows were gathering, making pictures upon wall and carpet. All were revolved into that single look that seemed to take voice and cry aloud against her.

She staggered up and locked her hands across her eyes; but the picture struggled through, taunting her brain and poor tired heart with its own mercilessness.

"What right have I to be so hard?" she cried, in convulsive agony. "Is he not kinder to me than anyone else save Walter Marchmont? Has not my own brother turned from me? Can I expect pardon when I gave none—none? Oh, Father, thou God of the righteous and sinful alike, teach me what I am to do. Thou hast said, 'Vengeance is mine,' and yet Thou hast commanded us to forgive 'until seventy times seven times.' He has not sinned against me, but against Thee, and he has repented. Teach me what to do. Show me how to forgive. Help me to do as I would wish others to do to me. Lord, if Thou hast sent me for the purpose of saving his soul, let me bow with submission to the decree of Heaven. Teach me, help me!"

She had fallen upon her knees, and as she arose tears rained over her face. That expression which she never could forget was before her still. She could neither fence it in nor drive it out. It was beside, above, and beyond her, torturing her.

In desperation she sprang to the door and touched an electric button, waiting with abated breath the answer to her summons.

It came at last.

"Is Mr. Gordon in the house?" she inquired, huskily.

"I think so, ma'am."

"Ask him if he will come to me."

"Yes, ma'am."

She closed the door and waited—waited in an agony of suspense. An hysterical oppression was upon her; a weight upon her chest seemed stifling her. Her eyes ached, and the heat of a white-hot furnace seemed licking through her veins.

"I must be going mad," she kept repeating. "Why doesn't he come? I am afraid—afraid of myself."

The face, with its awful expression, was dancing before her, dancing like a demon upon a grave.

It made her head swim, and a dizziness that was horrible came over her. She caught her temples between her hands, but it seemed only to double the fearful vision that was haunting her.

"Why don't he come?" she cried aloud. "Oh, what have I done?"

Two great crimson spots burned in either cheek; her hands were like red-hot coals, and yet her teeth chattered and she shook as though from ague.

The door opened and Gordon entered hastily, frightened because the servant had said to him that his wife looked as if she were dying.

Eden sprang up and flung out her arms, her breath coming hot and short between her words.

"Forgive me, forgive me!" she gasped. "I was wrong to speak to you—like that—and now—now—ugh! Don't look at me like that. Can't you see that I am going mad? Oh, Wilfred, my head, my head! Save me, save me! It was all the look, the dreadful, dreadful look. Take it away! I will never say a hard or cruel thing again—never, never! Oh, Wilfred, forgive me, and don't look at me like that."

He caught her in his arms and held her closely against his throbbing breast.

"My darling, calm yourself!" he whispered. "Is there anything that I would not forgive you? I am only looking at you with the tenderest love, the most adoring pity. Eden, Eden, what has come to you? Child, child, speak to me!"

But she only sank further back in his arms, her great eyes fixed blankly upon him, her teeth chattering horribly.

She lifted her burning hand and placed it upon his face.

Hastily lifting her and placing her upon the bed, he rang the bell violently.

"The nearest doctor—quick!" he cried, desperately, to the servant. "My wife is dying!"

With his own trembling fingers he unfastened her dress, she staring up at him with the same stupid expression, making no movement to either assist or deter him.

After what seemed hours to Gordon the doctor came.

One look told him the truth, but he feared to believe it.

He turned to Gordon.

"Has she had any severe mental shock?" he asked, anxiously.

"Yes."

"I thought so. She has a most unusual attack of brain fever. Nothing but the most skilful attendance can save her. Perhaps not that even."

Gordon tottered backward. The sun of the universe had suddenly set for him, leaving him in the midnight of darkness.

CHAPTER XXV.

The days dragged wearily enough to Wilfred Gordon, and yet in a certain sense they were the happiest he had ever known.

With the inconsistency of the delirious, Eden turned to him for everything. His was the only hand from whom she would receive her medicine; his the only touch that could calm her raving.

He would sit for hours upon the bed holding her in his arms, until the wild words would cease, the hot eyes close, and she would fall into a fitful slumber.

She was constantly beseeching him to forgive her, raving over the face with its terrible expression that stared at her always—always, but never a word of Walter Marchmont nor of Bertie, nor even of Malcolm or Alice Gordon. There was nothing in which Gordon was ever accused or even censured, but only the wild, piteous cry for forgiveness and for the removal of that terrible face.

How Gordon's rebellious heart would tremble as he felt those soft arms about his neck, that sweet, pale face upon his breast!

"But," he reflected, bitterly, "I must not forget that it is delirium. When she is well again she will return to the old detestation, the old loathing, and it will be harder than ever—a thousand times harder—to bear."

He would groan when his lips touched hers—groaned as he remembered how she would call him a thief if she but knew he had stolen a kiss from her irresponsible lips.

Once she even kissed him of her own accord, and a great tear splashed upon her face and on her hand.

"Is that my wedding-ring?" she had asked, in an awe-struck whisper, pointing to it.

Gordon could have cried aloud. How many times he had vowed that, if Heaven would but spare her, he would return her to Malcolm and Bertie. He swore it to himself and to Heaven.

"Not now," he would say, with a shudder—"not now, when she turns to me, and I almost persuade myself that she loves me; but when the old hatred comes again. When I see the first touch of scorn and of loathing return, then, then—"

The sentence ended in a gasp and a sob. Heaven knows he meant it!

"If you don't take some rest yourself you will die," the doctor said to him. "Surely you can trust the nurse for a few hours!"

But Gordon shook his head and smiled.

The only rest he took was upon a couch in the sick chamber.

He was as delicate as a man could be—sensitive in every way to what he knew she would desire—yet his devotion was something to be remembered.

"It is marvellous!" the doctor said to his wife. "I never saw such idolatry in my life. The man simply never leaves her. I do not see how he lives."

Mrs. Bruce, with the sympathy born of sorrow, offered her services; but Gordon did all—everything—while the professional nurse looked on and marvelled.

And then the day came when they were told they would know the result of their tender care.

Eden had fallen into a deep, quiet sleep—a slumber that was to decide her fate.

How Gordon suffered during those hours that they sat and watched her no pen could ever picture!

His very heart seemed to stand still. All the sweetness of contact with her was going out of his life.

He had promised to give her up when her scorn of him returned, and the moment had come. He bowed his head, and a heavy dew dampened his forehead, but he made no sign, and bore it bravely.

The doctor stood at the side, the nurse at the foot, and he sat at the head of the bed. Her eyes would rest upon him last. If he had but been conscious of the whitened, piteous pleading of his face!

A movement from the doctor aroused him, and he glanced up.

The dark eyes had opened.

He held his breath as he saw them travel in helpless perplexity from the doctor to the nurse, back to the doctor again, then slowly turn upon him.

His heart stood still; his very soul seemed entranced.

A moment of bewilderment, then a genuine smile broke over the wan features, and a little, helpless hand was lifted wearily and extended to him.

"What is it, Wilfred?" she asked, in a weak voice. "Oh, I remember! I was very cruel. Forgive me. I am so sleepy."

That was all. The weary eyes had closed again.

What prevented Gordon from fainting he never could tell.

Everything turned suddenly black before him, and when he recovered himself the doctor was holding a glass of wine to his lips.

"Your labour of love is rewarded," he said, a moisture like tears dimming his eyes. "She owes her life to your care. You must not get sick now until she is well enough to repay it. Go now and sleep. You need not return, because I shall put you out of the room if you do, anyway. I will remain until your return. Don't fear. All danger is passed."

And Gordon went.

He threw himself upon a bed, but his excitement was too great to admit of sleep.

His brain was in a whirl, his heart was on fire.

"It is not true," he told himself. "She was too weak to know. But if it should be—if it should! It is not—it is not! Oh, Eden, Eden! you will send me from you when you remember, and then I will keep my word," with a terrible shiver. "Yes, then I will keep my word!"

He had crept back into the room before she awakened, but a drapery concealed him. He listened, though the throbbing of his heart seemed to deafen him as she spoke.

"What is the matter with me?" she asked. "My head feels so strangely."

"You have been ill, my dear," the doctor answered—"ill unto death. You owe your life to your husband's unflinching devotion."

"My husband?"

"Yes, dear. He has never left you either night or day. I have never seen such tenderness—such patience. I knew a mother once who died when I told her that her child was dead, but her devotion to it was nothing compared with his. For such love I would give my life. Ah, child, it is the only thing upon earth worth living for. I wish I could make you understand what you owe to him. I wish I could make you feel the marvellous depth of his sublime devotion. It would convert the most hideous distortion into beauty. Its baptism would purify a soul scourged with guilt. I congratulate you, my dear, upon possessing that which has no equal."

Eden's face was covered with her hands.

"Where is he?" she asked, in a trembling voice.

Then she uncovered her face and saw him.

Quivering under her weakness, she put out both hands to him.

He tottered to her side and knelt beside the bed. Doctor and nurse withdrew.

His face was concealed in the covering of her bed, but by a slow sob that escaped him she knew that he was weeping.

She laid her hand upon his head wearily, but with such gentleness that one could almost imagine it to be tenderness.

"Don't, Wilfred!" she whispered. "I have been both cruel and merciless, but I beg your pardon. You have been wrong—very wrong—but we will try to forget that now if we can, and begin again. I am grateful for your love, even though it has cursed me. I have been entirely in your power, and you have spared me every humiliation. I should have died, and you have saved my life. Wilfred, give me time—just a little time—and I will try to show you that I am not quite heartless. I shall try to be your wife in more than name."

"Oh, Eden, my darling, my darling!"

The exclamation was a heart-wrung moan, and not a cry of delight, as she had expected.

The white face was lifted, but it was distorted with anguish.

"How you shame me when you speak like that!" he cried, miserably. "I cannot accept your generous sacrifice. I have taken advantage of you—I have forced you into an act that you abhor; but I will release you from it. When you wish it, I will send for your friends and restore you to them, even if my heart breaks."

Her hand strayed down to his face, and she smiled—a trifle bitterly 'tis true, but also with infinite gentleness.

"You must not do that, Wilfred," she said, wearily. "You have saved my life, and it is yours. I give it to you."

"Eden!"

The cry startled her, so replete was it with hoarse, wild, unbelieving joy.

She never had seen anything like the staggering happiness of his countenance. Tears came to her eyes.

"Poor boy!" she whispered. "You have sinned against me, against yourself, and against Heaven, but I have been very hard, very cold."

"I cannot believe it!" he gasped. "There must be some mistake. You do not really wish

to remain here with me. Child, don't mock me—don't forget what I am!"

"What you have been," she corrected. "I am trying to forget it, Wilfred, with all my might, and some day I shall succeed. I am not mocking you. I am your wife, and I really wish to remain here with you."

A quivering, gasping sigh, that was half a sob, burst from his lips.

He tried to tell her the truth, but the words stuck in his throat and refused to be uttered.

Was he to give up the happiness for which he had risked everything, when it was so close within his grasp? It would be more than human.

"Let me look at you!" he whispered, hungrily. "Let me read in your dear, tired eyes that this is not mere delirium! Eden, I—will you prove it to me? Will you—kiss me?"

She made a motion as if to lift herself.

He took the slight form in his arms and raised it tenderly, pressing his lips upon hers; then he laid her back almost hastily.

"Forgive me!" he blurted, hiding his face again. "I am a miserable cur—I never can be anything else. Eden, you do wrong to trust me. I am guilty—guilty!"

"Purified by fire," she whispered, weakly. "I—am—so tired!"

"See how selfish I am! Darling, you must sleep. May I—may I sit beside you as you sleep?"

She smiled feebly, and nodded.

He drew a chair beside her and sat down. He touched her hand, and as she made no movement of repulsion he took it in his and held it. She fell asleep.

Half-an-hour afterwards the doctor entered softly.

Gordon's head had fallen upon the bed, where his lips touched the uncovered arm, and in that cramped position he, too, slept.

As softly as he had entered the doctor withdrew.

Eden was the first to awaken.

She recognised Gordon with a start, but did not disturb him.

"Poor, tired boy!" she murmured, her hand resting upon his head as lightly as the kiss of a sunbeam. "In spite of his sin, how I wish that I could love him! I will try—I will try!"

And in his sleep Gordon murmured:

"Heaven forgive me! Remember the magnitude of the temptation—the temptation!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

"Will you ask Miss Gordon to come to the library? I wish to see her particularly."

Walter Marchmont had never seemed so stern and cold as when he addressed these words to the slightly astonished servant; but unquestioningly she obeyed.

He walked with quick, agitated strides up and down the long room, until at last the door opened and Alice entered, dainty and cool in white mull, with a broad sash of delicate blue that matched her eyes to a nicety.

She went up to Marchmont and took his arm coquettishly.

"You sent for me, Walter?" she asked, sweetly.

"Yes."

"My! how like a restless, caged tiger you look! What has gone wrong, dear?"

He disengaged his arm from her hands and stepped back a pace or two.

"I have received a most unpleasant letter," he replied, frigidly—"a letter from Eden."

Alice started.

She knew the worst as well as though she had been told, and an icy hand seemed to grasp her heart; but she retained her self-control admirably.

"From Eden!" she cried. "Entreating your forgiveness, I suppose?"

"She says very little about that. She knew that she had it without the asking."

"Indeed!"

"She wrote to warn me of a danger that threatens me."

"A danger?"

"A most terrible danger, Miss Gordon. The danger of being taken in by an adventurer."

"I—I don't understand. Really, Walter, I am so ignorant that—"

"It is useless to play it further, Alice. The game is up. I know the whole story of your connection with Malcolm Carlton and Herbert Stanton."

"Mine?"

"Yours!"

"I don't know what you are talking about. Who are—the men, you mention?"

"Both your dupes, it seems; one your husband."

"That is false!"

"Their address is given in this letter. Will you come with me to them, that they may corroborate what you have said?"

"No, I will not!" angrily. "What right have you to believe what a jealous woman says against me?"

"Eden Chasemore is as true as the stars."

"True? She is false from beginning to end. Do you think I do not know her? That is why she left here. I told her she must, or I would tell you all. She has a living husband, from whom she is not even divorced, and when she discovered that I would not allow her to dupe you she eloped with my brother. He knows the whole story."

"Alice!"

"I would not have told you this had you not forced it upon me, but now you know."

"I know that you have stained your soul with the blackest falsehood that ever woman told. She is as pure as an angel. If she should be mistaken concerning you, you will not object to seeing either or both of those men."

"Do you think I could endure a humiliation such as that?"

"You need not be humiliated. I will obtain an introduction to one of them, and bring him here."

"Never, never! I am not a criminal, Walter Marchmont, to be up for identification."

"I don't know whether you are or not. Listen to me, Alice. I have the strongest reasons for believing that you and your brother are adventurers, but the truth or untruth of my belief will make small difference so long as I am not your dupe. Leave my house at once quietly, and you have nothing to fear from me."

"Surely, I do not comprehend you. Am I to understand that you turn me, your affianced wife, from your house because of the fiendish jealousy of—a thief?"

A dull red surged into Marchmont's cheeks, and his fingers closed ominously.

"If a man had said that," he exclaimed, heavily, "I should have strangled him. Courtesy to your sex will not allow me to prolong this conversation further, Miss Gordon. I must request you to excuse me, to consider this the end of an engagement that was forced upon me; and I must inform you that I have already engaged apartments for you at an hotel in the village. The carriage is ordered in an hour. You can wait for your trunks at the hotel while your maid packs them."

"Mr. Marchmont!"

Alice had not breath enough to say more. She was livid with rage.

"You see," continued Marchmont, sternly, "I saw so little reason for doubting the truth of these allegations that I did not pause to inquire into them, but arranged details before sending for you."

"And do you imagine I will submit quietly to this?"

"There is nothing else that you can do, Miss Gordon."

"You shall see!"

"Threats are so idle and vulgar! I do not fear you. All danger is passed now that I have ceased to pity you. You will excuse me if I leave you, will you not?"

"Listen one moment!"

"I had rather not."

"But I insist. The man who you say is my husband is the husband of the girl whom you know as Eden Chasemore. He believes her to be dead. The other one is her brother. That, Mr. Marchmont, I swear to you!"

"That does not alter the case. I have given you an alternative through a desire to do you justice. You have refused it. That to my mind is proof enough, and nothing could change it. Miss Gordon, will you leave the house?"

She drew herself up defiantly, seeing that all hope was at an end.

"Yes, I shall go; but you shall repent this day, Walter Marchmont! Don't forget that. If it is any consolation to you to know that your sweetheart, Eden Chasemore, is living willingly under Wilfred Gordon's protection, the assurance is yours."

Marchmont's face glowed with anger.

"That, Miss Gordon, I know to be a malicious falsehood," he answered, curbing his temper as much as possible. "If it gives you any satisfaction, however, I will tell you that I shall inquire into it most minutely, and if I find that your brother has so much as injured a hair of her head I shall kill him. As I cannot persuade you to leave the room, I must be the one to do it."

He bowed with an excessive politeness and withdrew, closing the door behind him.

How long Alice remained standing there, looking blankly at the door, she could never quite determine.

She aroused herself at last with a little shake. The cold, cruel, bitter sneer upon her lips was repulsive.

"So, my prince," she muttered, "this is your work!"

She gnawed her lip a moment in silence, glancing about at the elegance that surrounded her.

She noted the rows and rows of books that were a fortune in themselves, the quiet gorgeousness of the furnishings, the extreme beauty of the architecture, the many evidences of wealth, of refinement and of liberality about her. It seemed to impress her anew.

"I have lost it all," she continued, with a comprehensive wave of the arms, "all through you, my handsome Rupert. Very well. I always predicted that the end would come in some such way. Now for my revenge! Oh, it shall be worthy of me! I must plan it well. Let me see. That is it. Malcolm Carlton and Herbert Staunton must assist me. They shall avenge me. While they are making you reap the harvest of your own sowing I shall have time to throw a lariat about her neck that will give me the opportunity I desire. This is the third time that little vixen has stepped in my way. Well—ah, ah! take care, Alice! Now is your time. Prove yourself worthy of your past record and hesitate at nothing!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

"A lady to see Mr. Carlton and Mr. Staunton!"

Malcolm's valet was the speaker, interrupting them as they sat in their smoking-room discussing the last report of their detective, which was an extremely unsatisfactory one.

"A lady!" exclaimed Bertie, glancing up through a cloud of smoke in some surprise.

"Yes, sir."

"Her name?"

"She would give none."

"That's strange. Will you go, Malcolm?"

"She particularly requested to see both, sir."

She said her business was important."

"Perhaps it is something of Eden," said Malcolm.

That was enough.

Two minutes later Bertie followed him into the drawing-room.

A lady, clothed in sombre black, unrelieved even by a trimming of jet, arose. Both men stopped aghast.

"You do not seem pleased to see me," she said, mournfully. "Ah, well! Could I have expected anything else? Herbert, Malcolm, I have come to make amends for the past."

The wrong that I have done you both lives with me always—always!"

Staunton looked at her doubtfully.

"You were always a capital actress, Alice," he said, coolly. "Are you trying it again, with an object in view?"

"On my soul, no!"

"Because if you are, you can accomplish nothing without either of us."

"I cannot blame you. You think that I had sunk too low in mire ever to emerge. Perhaps you are right; but that does not prevent a struggle, a wild desire to cleanse myself as much as possible. Where should I begin save upon those whom I have injured most? Staunton, have you no words of forgiveness?"

The woman's eyes were fixed upon Herbert with a peculiar, reeling brilliancy. She had come entirely for revenge, but the old passion was taking possession of her again. Her hatred of Eden seemed to boil.

"We have neither forgiveness nor censure," answered Herbert, contemptuously. "You are like a half-forgotten nightmare."

"You are cruel!"

"Look, here, Alice, you have not come here for any such sentimental rubbish as that. Now, tell us outright what you want. If it's money, perhaps you'll get it; but if it's sympathy, I haven't learned yet to kiss the hand that smites me, particularly when it deals a blow like the one you gave."

"You cannot believe in my repentance, and yet I will prove to you how sincere it is. Herbert, your wife, whom you have believed to be dead, is alive and well!"

Both men were very white.

"You know that?" whispered Malcolm.

"I know it. She has lived until recently with a family named Marchmont."

"Walter Marchmont?"

"Exactly. I saw her there. She was well treated and happy, until a few days ago, when she was abducted."

"By whom?"

"I should like to prepare you for a great blow, Bertie. The man with whom she has disappeared is—Rupert Howard."

"Rupert Howard?"

The horror of the exclamation could not have been greater.

"Yes," Alice continued. "Under the name of Wilfred Gordon he entered Marchmont's house. He fell in love with Eden, watched his chances, and carried her away."

"Good heavens! It is worse than I thought."

"It is bad enough, Heaven knows; for when Rupert Howard has an end to gain he pauses at nothing."

Malcolm groaned.

"Have you any means of knowing where he is?" asked Herbert, endeavouring to suppress his agitation.

"I cannot tell you exactly, but I know that he is in London somewhere. He has rooms in—street, though I cannot tell you the number."

"Then we will find him! You may be sure of that."

Instantly a bell was rung and a servant dispatched for the detective.

"You will remain, will you not?" asked Herbert, of Alice. "The detective may desire to question you."

"I am assured of your protection?"

"Certainly."

"Then I will remain."

"And another thing, Alice. I don't know what your object may be in this, and I don't care, so long as you assist us in finding Eden. If we succeed, I shall place in your hands a cheque for two thousand pounds."

The woman could scarcely conceal a greedy sparkle in her blue eyes.

"I will accept it; for, while you will not believe in the sincerity of my repentance, it is nevertheless most real to me. It will enable me to live an honest life, and I thank you from

my soul. There is just one thing more I would ask."

"Name it."

"It is that when Eden has been found and her abductor has been punished, when happiness is restored, and my sin has to a certain extent been wiped out, that you will let me see Eden for five minutes alone."

Staunton looked at her curiously.

A single word escaped him:—

"Treachery!"

Alice started.

"On my soul, no!" she exclaimed, half reproachfully, half mournfully. "What can I do to convince you of the genuineness of my repentance? Bertie, how cruel you are!"

"If I wrong you—if your words are true—then I beg your pardon; but I cannot forget that it has been you who has caused me all the unhappiness of my life."

"I know it—oh, Heaven, how well! But do you think I have not suffered? Even in dreams I have known no peace, no rest. Bertie, have you lived your life entirely without sin? Have you no pity?"

"Much—where repentance is sincere."

"Then promise me that when Eden is restored to you, when happiness full and complete has come to you again, that you will let me see her for five minutes—just five. I ask no more."

"I promise it!" cried Malcolm, hoarsely, while his friend still hesitated. "Find her for us, and I will do anything—anything that you may demand!"

"I demand nothing. I entreat pardon alone."

"The gentleman!"

The servant's announcement interrupted what she meant should be a most telling effect.

As Carlton and his friend turned eagerly to the detective she allowed her mask to drop for just a moment for breathing time.

"I shall win!" she muttered, triumphantly.

"Now, Bertie, Rupert, Eden, look to yourselves. My revenge shall be worthy of me—artistic, complete!"

And while the two men were eagerly explaining to the officer, he—the detective—was watching closely but cautiously the features of the woman.

"Bertha Howard, by all that is wonderful!" he exclaimed, mentally. "Repentance? Bosh! She has some infernal scheme in her head, I'll wager my reputation. Ransom? No! It's a deeper plot than that. Motives must be looked to as well as the abduction, or more harm may be done."

"Let me see," he exclaimed, aloud. "You must be mistaken. I know who lives in every house on both sides of the street."

"Will you mention the names?" asked Alice, quickly. "I would know if I heard."

"Let me see. Broadhead—Perkins—Rathburn—Bruce—"

"That is it! The man's name is Bruce, with whom Rupert Howard—known as Wilfred Gordon—has his rooms."

"You are sure?"

"Quite sure."

"If that is true, we need know no more!"

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CHAPTER XXVIII.

A dapper young man in grey tweed ascended the steps of Mr. Bruce's residence, and pulled the bell vigorously.

"Does Mr. Bruce live here?" he asked of the servant who answered.

"Yes, sir."

"Is he in?"

"No, sir."

"Is Mr. Gordon in?"

"Mr. Gordon does not live here, sir."

"You are sure?"

"Yes, sir. He did live here, but has not been here for several weeks."

"That is queer."

"Oh, I am mistaken, sir! Mr. Gordon was here one night about ten days ago. I had forgotten it."

"Was he alone?"

"No. His wife was with him. They remained over night, leaving the following morning about six, to catch an early train."

"Do you know where they went?"

"No, sir."

"I am very anxious to see Mr. Gordon, and would make it worth your while to find out where he is for me if you can."

"I'm afraid it will be impossible, sir."

"Why?"

"Because I have no means of discovering."

"Can you tell me when Mr. Bruce will be home?"

"I cannot, sir. He is away on a business trip. We are uneasy about him, as we have heard nothing from him for two weeks, and don't know where he is."

"And Mrs. Bruce—where is she?"

"In bed, sir; ill with brain fever."

The visitor gnawed his moustache thoughtfully.

"I was particularly anxious to see Mr. Gordon," he said. "Can you tell me where to find Jim Lewis?"

"Jim Lewis, sir?"

The girl had started slightly.

"Yes."

"You mean Mr. Gordon's valet?"

"Yes."

"He—he has gone too."

"Is not your name Catherine?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you must know where Lewis is, for he is your *fancé*. Look here, my girl. It is almost essential that I should find Gordon, and if you will tell me where Jim Lewis is I shall succeed. Can I trust you? Do you know Jim Lewis's business?"

"Yes, sir."

The detective drew a trifle closer to her.

"Very well. If you know," he whispered, "and can keep your mouth shut, I don't mind telling you that we've got a big crib to crack if we can only get hold of Gordon. Without him we're all dished."

The woman looked at the man curiously. She knew all of Gordon and Bruce's "pals" well, both high and low, but she had never seen that one among the number. Something about the man's eye struck her. She could never remember exactly what, but it seemed a trifle too sharp. He was endeavouring to see not only her face but the interior of the hall as well. She didn't like it, and drew herself up curiously.

"Jim Lewis and I had a row, sir, and he's gone, the devil knows where. I don't know nothing about him, and I don't want to. It was a finding out that he was a thief that made me send him to the rightabout, and it was that same that made Mr. Bruce give Mr. Gordon notice, though I don't suppose as I ought to tell you. Mr. Bruce is a gentleman as was a friend of Mr. Gordon's till he found him out, and he'd call a policeman quicker than a wink to arrest you if he'd find you at his door. You'd better go, if you know which side of your bread is buttered, and the next time you have a 'crib to crack,' crack it yourself, and don't come bothering honest folks about it."

The speech was delivered so vociferously that the detective was completely bewildered.

A red spot burned in either of the girl's cheeks, and her eyes snapped.

He made one more attempt.

"You must know someone that knows Lewis. If you can in any way help me to find him I'll give you ten pounds."

"If you don't get out of here I'll hand you over to the police, that's what I'll do. If you want to find out about anything, you go to the person that told you he was engaged to me, and ask. Now I'm done."

The officer saw that further effort was useless. He did not dream that the girl suspected him, and was therefore nonplussed. He turned away thoughtfully, and while still standing upon the top step the girl slammed the door.

She stood watching him through the glass, and suddenly saw him start and look downward. She followed the direction of his glance, and saw that the man he wanted had emerged from the basement door, and was starting down the street.

The detective followed.

Catherine's heart leaped until it almost choked her. She opened the door and saw the detective was shadowing the man. She understood the situation like a flash. If the man with whom she had been speaking had really wished to see Lewis for the purpose he named he would have overtaken him at once.

She sprang back, closed the door, and rushed through the hall, nearly knocking a man down, but scarcely seeing him.

"Charlie," she cried, entering her own room, "do you know where your uncle Jim has gone?"

"Yes," answered a boy about thirteen years old.

"Where?"

"To Owen's."

"Thank Heaven for that! You walk down towards Owen's without seeming to hurry, but do so. Join your uncle Jim carelessly, and tell him that he is being watched. If there should be a man with him, take double care, but let him know. The detective is a young man dressed in grey. Make haste, my lad, for everything depends upon you now."

The boy sprang away.

As the woman turned to reascend the stairs she saw Gordon standing beside her door. He was deathly white.

"Did you know that man?" he asked, hoarsely.

"No."

"It was the detective."

"I knew it when I saw him watching Jim. Do you think he will return?"

"Undoubtedly, and he knows the house watched as well, now that he knows what you said about Jim was false."

"What will you do?"

"Heaven knows! It looks like the game is up."

"Up? Why, do you forget—"

"Nothing; but you forget—my wife."

"True. But self-preservation—"

"Pouf! Where she remains I shall. There are reasons, Catherine, why I cannot go without her—why I will not. I thank you—"

"I beg that you will not, sir. I can never forget what I owe to you. I would go through fire to serve you."

"I know it, and Heaven bless you for it. I am done with the old life, Catherine, and it seems too great a shame, just as I am beginning to live, that I should be like a rat caught in a trap. I hope, however, that I may be able to bear it like a man. Perhaps it is for the best. If anything occurs, let me know."

"You are going—"

"To my wife."

With bent head he walked away. Catherine looked after him curiously.

"A man as might have been an angel if he hadn't started wrong. It was all Alice, curse her! If I could only have met her—if I ever do meet her—"

The sentence was unfinished, but an observer would have shuddered at the expression of the woman's face. It was gruesome, hideous.

Slowly, sadly, Gordon walked upstairs.

He never left Eden but that he feared to enter her presence again, lest the sweet gentleness of her manner should have once more turned to contempt.

He hesitated, with his hand upon the knob of the door, before entering, but finally summoned courage.

Eden was lying upon a couch near the window, white and still. She turned her great, dark eyes as the door opened, and a faint smile stole over her lips as she recognised Gordon.

"How long you were!" she murmured.

He drew a chair beside her and sat down quietly.

"You missed me?" he asked, endeavouring to conceal the eagerness of his tone.

"Yes."

"How good you are to say so!"

"What has happened, Wilfred?"

"Why do you ask?"

"You are pale, distressed. Tell me."

"It is nothing."

"You are deceiving me. Do not. Have I not the right to know?"

Gordon's face flushed deepest crimson. How sweet it was to hear her speak like that! and what an utter coward he had become since he had a prospect of winning her love!

"Oh, Eden, how much the scoundrel you make me feel!" he said, bitterly. "What right have I to force the retribution of mispent years upon you?"

"It is too late to think of that now, Wilfred. Tell me what retribution threatens you now?"

"The danger of arrest."

She tried to raise herself, but fell back, her eyes glowing with excitement.

"There!" he exclaimed, catching her hands and passing his hand across her brow. "See what an utter brute I am to excite you like that!"

"Don't think of me! Wilfred, go and save yourself."

"I cannot. The only safety for me is in your presence. Eden, you must let me stay beside you until the last."

"No—oh, no! I understand it all. You are afraid to trust me; but you need not be. I swear that I shall remain here until you come, or send for me! I will protect the secrets of your life as much as possible. Wilfred, will you go?"

"I cannot. It is not you I fear, but others. Eden, suppose—suppose your brother should have considered the matter and—"

"It is too late, I tell you. Do you forget that I am your wife, Wilfred?"

The man groaned.

"I remember that you are mine under compulsion."

"But yours, nevertheless. Poor Wilfred, how you suffer!"

"More than you think! Oh, Heaven, why am I chained to evil?"

"You are not. You must not say it—for my sake! Listen! You think that I despise you, but I do not—indeed I do not. I pity you so tenderly that some day I know I shall forget the past and love you."

Eden!

"Take me to some place where you will be safe, dear, until I am well enough to travel; then let us go away anywhere, far from here, where neither of us will remember. Moving me will do less harm than the suspense I should be in concerning you. Promise me!"

"My darling! my darling! It is another link in the chain that holds me. How can I escape from the errors of the past? I am too weak—too weak!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

Alone in his own room Wilfred Gordon sat, watching the stars.

The misery of a whole life seemed condensed into those moments, where all the errors of a guilty past passed in phantom procession before him, searing his brow with heavy lines and drawing his handsome mouth into a tense, straight line.

The stars seemed to have grown cold and chilled his soul, instead of sinking there to bring peace and calm.

Conscience was at work! That conscience that is the fire of perdition burning into the soul of the condemned—that conscience that makes us in our finite way understand the infinity of hell.

He saw within his grasp that for which he had longed with a hope that was backed by despair, yet it had turned to gall upon his palate.

He loved Eden recklessly, desperately, with a headlong, mad passion that was like the rapids below the falls. He cared nothing whatever for the danger in which he found himself—that but added empyrean delights—but he knew that some day she must discover all; he realised that the day must come when she would believe his idolatry had been all a lie, and he shuddered helplessly.

"What am I to do?" he groaned. "Give her up just when happiness is within my hands! How can I—how can I? Yet I know that, as I see her love growing, it will become more bitter to me daily, until I go mad or die. It is retribution—retribution for the hideous errors of my past! I have lost Eden through sin, even as Adam did. But she shall not suffer. I will—and it all. Let me test my love, and see how strong it is. To-morrow, I will tell her the truth—the truth, that robs me of every joy, every hope; and then—then—"

He arose. Every joint seemed stiffened as with age, and his heart ached with a slow, dull pain, that was torture.

His face was grey under the starlight, and marked by lines that mental anguish alone can bring.

He was cold—cold from the stagnation of life blood and the moist misery that weighted him down.

He lifted his haggard eyes and gazed upward.

"Back to the old life!" he muttered, hoarsely. "Back to sin and despair, and she might have loved me—she might have loved me! What is the use? Life was made for love. No one could worship her so madly as I. Why, therefore, should I give her up for a sentiment? I will not—I will not! I will take her away—away to some tropical country, where she will bloom under my love. She need never know. If she should discover, there is always one resource—death. But oh! Her life—her sweet, pure young life—would be a wreck—a— Ah, let me save her from that!"

A violent shudder of abhorrence shook him. Everything that was manly and generous in his nature arose in revolt. He stood pale and half-trembling, then noiselessly he turned and without a sound entered Eden's room.

A fairy lamp, the candle burned nearly to the socket, flickered upon a table, and by the dim light Gordon saw her.

The covers were drawn across her chest, while one hand lay helplessly outside. The long, dark lashes swept her pale cheek with curious contrast. She seemed innocent and pure as a dreaming child.

He drew nearer, his soul in his eyes.

The delicate lids lifted, and the dark eyes looked straight into his own.

"You startle me, Wilfred," she murmured, with a smile. "I was dreaming."

"Of what?"

"A fairy story, I think."

"Of 'Beauty and the Beast'?"

"Perhaps something like it, though I don't think anyone could ever call you a beast. Substitute a wicked prince grown good, and you have it nearer."

"Not good, Eden. I wish to Heaven I were, for your sake."

(To be continued next week.)

(This story commenced in No. 2041. Back numbers can be obtained through all news-agents.)

GIVING PLEASURE

By UNCLE BENJAMIN.

It is so easy, nine times out of ten, to give pleasure rather than pain.

It takes no money; it is a smile, an appreciative word when a servant or a child does well, a mention of what one likes to hear spoken of rather than an irritating reference.

Give pleasure rather than pain when you speak of your friend's dress. If she has on anything becoming speak of that, not of the "thing that looks like a guy." If you search for it, you will always find in every dress something that might be praised. There is more misery caused among women and by women, to each other, over dress criticism, than results from any serious cause in their world. Nothing, in a small way, goes farther among girls than approving references to dress. "You look really pretty, my dear, in that." "Do I? You are an angel." Ask her about you the next day, and she says: "I do like her so much! She is so pleasant always, the darling!" Yet the thing that won its way to her heart was your simple compliment on her appearance. On the other hand, women break friendships quicker over ugly remarks about each other's attire than from almost any other cause. Give pleasure, I repeat, and keep friendships.

Give pleasure to the housewife. Say, "The woman who made this pitcher of lemonade knew how to do a good thing." Say, "How skilful your cook is! This dinner is exquisitely to my taste." Compliment her home arts of adornment. Seem pleased with what she has done for your comfort. Don't be an ingrate; especially in hot summer weather; but take notice of her painstaking efforts to make home comfortable, her even crude efforts at household adornment. Heaven knows how much pleasure we men might give at home. Instead of which, how much pain we give—thoughtlessly, cruelly.

Give pleasure. Tell the grocer of the good things you have had of him. You have spoken often enough of the bad tea, the poor flour. Give the man a happy moment. Say, "I like your store, on the whole, better than any shop in town." That's true or you would not trade there.

The seamstress, poor soul, has nerves and sensibilities, like any other mortal. Why not ask her to go for a ride with you? Why not offer to take her with you to the theatre some evening? She will be as well dressed as you, I'll warrant you, when the time comes. And the music to her hungry ears, unlike your own surfeited ears, would be heavenly pleasure.

Give pleasure. Pay a poor man's debt. Send a broken man his bill receipted. Go, forgive someone his debt to you, as you ask God to forgive you your debts. Surprise someone with a release from a heavy obligation, whatever it may be. Your joy will be greater than the money or service could bring you. Flowers to a sick-room; a call at the sick man's door if one is too busy to go in for a quarter of an hour's chat; a word of inquiry for the absent, so that his son, as partner, may write that you asked after him; what trifles! Yet how much pleasure they are capable of bestowing in an ugly world! "Old fellow, I am glad for you!" with a hearty slap on the shoulder, congratulating him on good fortune instead of being envious—what a real pleasure it is! I tell you, young men, it is such trifles that make a fellow welcome among men. The proprietor of a great newspaper is reported to have said recently: "The good fellow is known everywhere. It makes no difference where he comes from." The good fellow, among other things, is he who gives innocent, hearty pleasure to others wherever he goes.

Give pleasure to children. God be praised that we are not all grown men and women in this world. But how often they are among

the unhappiest of the race. They deserve not a pound of suffering—yet they carry tons. For Heaven's sake give them all the innocent pleasure you can. "What's the good of going to the circus? I've seen it all." Yes, but the children will enjoy it. That's reason enough. Yet that is the very last reason that some folks will consider. A child's pleasure is a target for many a brute's kick. Then he wonders that his son grows up an ingrate, and his daughter runs away from home. The care for their lawful pleasures which some wise school teachers exercise is the fetter of gold that binds the child pupils. A school teacher who never seems to think of anything beyond hammering certain precepts into a child's mind is not fit for his place. The skilful teacher is often seen trying to arrange a game, planning a sport, suggesting some fun and let-up from the everlasting grind. When a child is dead, ah! then we are glad—oh! so glad—of every day we made it happy, and the memory of its smile is like the rosy dawn in the eastern sky when the west is dark and lowering.

Do not forget ye who can so easily pay it, the ten shillings which you owe God's charity, the Fresh Air Fund, for the city poor in summer time. Do not always drive alone, fair lady, when the invalid girl is languishing by her one window in the low dwelling that you pass in reaching the gay park. Do not forget the bankrupt, discouraged and set on one side, your old friend of boyhood and competitor in the market, when, sir, you give a birthday dinner in your fine dwelling. Do not forget the aged preacher, sacred heart of his, who is now long past his service to humanity, that he has loved so well for Christ's sake. Do not forget the minstrel and the actor, who, broken and old now, once made you many a glad hour. A thousand of earth's neglected are all about us. To give them pleasure may bless them a bit, but the blessing on our own hearts is a thousand times more health-giving.

Where Women Outnumber Men

In Mumbles—a little village near Swansea—there are six hundred more females than males out of a total population of four thousand. In hundreds of towns and villages throughout England and Wales, women, by reason of their weaker frame, have a preponderance—if not in numbers at least in the ailments and diseases to which flesh is heir. There are few women who at times do not suffer from anemia and debility, and the following case will show how effective Bile Beans are in these diseases. Miss May Musson, of Breach Road, Maripool, speaking to a "Derbyshire Advertiser" reporter, said:—"A short time back, anemia, indigestion and debility had so reduced me that I could not take a morsel of solid food. The result of this was that I lost all my strength, and could not walk even a short distance without feeling utterly exhausted. No matter what kind of food I tried, the effect was just the same, and caused me great distress. I had a severe pain in the left side which hurt me whenever I moved, and it seemed as if nothing I took would do me any good. I commenced taking Bile Beans, and before long I began to feel better. The neighbours, too, began to notice a great improvement in me, and many told me I was looking vastly different. Never in all my life have I felt so well as I do at the present moment. I am sure I owe my life to Bile Beans." Bile Beans are superior to all known medicines for indigestion, anemia, dizziness, liver, and kidney disorders, constipation, piles, headache, debility, nervousness, summer lag, and all female ailments. All chemists stock them, or you may obtain direct from the Bile Bean Manufacturing Co., 119, London Wall, E.C., by sending prices, one and three halfpence or two and nine.

BITTER TEACHING

"Martin's wife is good for nothing at all," said old Mrs. Bates, "and so I've told him from the very beginning!"

Mrs. Bates's glasses shone like two circles of fire; her false teeth were tightly clenched, and her darning-needle was brandished in the air like a poniard, as she uttered the words with genuine mother-in-law animus.

"Isn't that rather a sweeping assertion, mother?" spoke a voice, half angry, half in jest.

Mrs. Bates started, and dropped the darning-needle. She had not calculated on any other auditor than old Mrs. French, but she clung bravely to her colours.

"Well, I don't know that I'm speaking anything more than the truth," said she. "Here you are, borrowing money to keep your credit afloat, and not knowing in the morning whether your name won't be in the bankruptcy list before night, and your wife ordering peaches at the fruiterer's, as if they were roadside blackberries."

"But Nellie is such a child, you know!" pleaded the young husband, with a pained look.

"When a girl is old enough to be married," said Mrs. Bates, viciously, "it's time to leave off childish ways."

"You never did her justice, mother."

"Facts are facts," said Mrs. Bates, glaring at an especially aggravating hole in the sock she was darning.

Martin did not stop to argue the question further. It was one upon which he could hardly trust himself.

He had made a love-match to please himself, not to suit his mother. Naturally it had been a sore disappointment to her that Martin had chosen pretty Nellie Brook, the pupil-teacher in a boarding-school, for his wife, instead of Miss Graham, who had a large fortune of her own.

He went home a little perturbed in his mind. Nellie ran to meet him, like a bird flying from its nest.

She was a blue-eyed, fair-haired little elf, with cheeks like nectarines, and a swaying, lissom grace of motion that no dancing-master could ever teach.

"Five minutes behind the dinner-hour, Mr. Truant!" she cried, gaily. "I've been watching at the window for you ever so long!"

She led him exultingly into the little dining-room, and seated herself opposite to him. He glanced with some dismay at the daintily-spread board.

"Venison cutlets!" he said. "And claret! And a bunch of long-stemmed roses, in February! Isn't this just—a little—extravagant?"

"It's your birthday, Martin!" cried Nellie, clapping her hands. "You are twenty-seven years old to-day, and this is a feast to celebrate it. Aha! you thought I had forgotten it, didn't you? But I never forget anything. There are some big peaches for dessert, and some pineapple ice."

Bates whistled softly.

"And what did you pay for all these luxuries?" said he.

Nellie opened her blue eyes.

"Pay!" she repeated. "I didn't pay anything. I had them charged to your account."

He frowned. His mother's words recurred unpleasantly to him.

"Nellie," said he, "this is senseless extravagance! You may not know that I am on the eve of a financial crisis!"

"I don't understand," faltered the young wife, instinctively recoiling, more from the tone than the words. "What is—a financial crisis?"

Martin Bates pushed back his plate, angrily.

"My mother is right," said he. "I do believe you are a fool, Nellie!"

The carmine flush rose to her cheek.

"Has your mother been talking about me, Martin?" said she. "Oh, I know I am not

very wise. I am not yet eighteen; you must remember; but—but—you knew that when you married me. And I don't quite understand now why you are angry with me. I have been trying hard to please you—"

"To beggar me, you mean!" he interrupted.

And then with an avalanche of hasty words, he told her of his precarious prospects, his impending ruin.

"And in the face of all this," he cried, "you fritter away my hard-earned money in trifles, and set a princely feast before me, when I don't know where my to-morrow's bread is to come from! Couldn't you have ordered a service of gold-plate?" he added, with a bitter sarcasm, "or hung the walls with chains of diamonds? Why need you have stopped where you did?"

Nellie had turned very pale; her lip quivered.

"Are you not a little unjust?" she asked.

"How was I to know this without being told?"

"Well, you know it now. And it does seem to me," added her husband, giving way to his irritation, "that you might at least have had ordinary sense instead of acting like a baby. Here, give me some of that venison, although it's like eating bank-notes. Since the stuff is here, it's not necessary to waste it. If a woman can't earn, she might at least save. Hartley's wife gets a hundred a year singing in a church choir, and Mrs. Jack Felton paints pictures that sell for fifty pounds each. But you—"

He poured out a glass of claret, and drank it with feverish haste.

"Yes, I," said Nellie, looking at him with strange, scared eyes. "I see it all now. I am sorry that I was such a poor investment. But—you said that you loved me. And I believed you."

"This meat is as tough as sole leather," said Bates, impatiently. "Tell the maid to

take it away. And the peaches are half decayed. Hump! when one thinks what the cost—"

"My feast is a failure, is it not?" said Nellie, with a cold laugh. "If you don't mind, Martin, I'll go to my own room. My head aches a little."

* * * * *

The failure of the ambitious house of Bates and Co. made a momentary ripple on the tide of business life, and then was forgotten. But when Bates awoke from the long brain fever which had nearly drifted him into the other world, he felt as if life had no more hopes for him—as if the world were a dream of despair.

"Where is Nellie?" he asked, faintly, when first they allowed him to talk.

Old Mrs. Bates heaved a sigh like the north wind coming down a chimney.

"I hardly know how to tell you, my boy!" said she. "But you'll remember that I always prophesied it. She has gone home to her people. She never was anything more than a human butterfly, and when real trouble came she was off to the sunshine. I told her plainly she had ruined you, and that it was her business to go into a shop, or get a situation in a school or something, so as to relieve you from the expense of supporting her. And when I'd reasoned for half-an-hour, she got calmly up and walked out of the room, and I haven't seen her since. I do hate a sullen temper!"

Martin made no comment. He could easily imagine the scorpion bitterness of his mother's tongue. Yet surely no taunting words could justify a wife in thus abandoning her husband when he needed her sorely.

"Let her do as she pleases," he muttered, between his set teeth. "I shall not write for her to come back—at least, not until I can provide a home for her such as she is accustomed to."

"A glass case for your butterfly, eh?" said

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Mrs. Bates, sneeringly. "I'm glad you think her worth it."

It was hard to begin again at life's beginning—to work his way up to that point where success once more became a possibility; yet Martin Bates was not devoid of courage and resolve.

But when, at the end of six long months, a second financial panic swept all his hopes away, he relapsed into a low fever, and turning his face to the wall, asked pitifully for Nellie.

"Nellie!" almost screamed his mother.

"Why, my son, the woman has left you!"

"She wouldn't have gone, mother, if you had not driven her away by your reproaches!"

"My boy, I hope you have too much pride to ask her to come back!" urged Mrs. Bates.

"I want her, mother," said Martin, simply.

"I can do everything for you, my boy!"

He shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"I want Nellie, mother. I want my own little, golden-haired, soft-voiced wife. Write to her. Tell her to come back."

"And suppose she shouldn't be willing to leave those fine relations of hers to share your hardships?"

"Write to her," he reiterated.

And Mrs. Bates was compelled, unwillingly, to obey.

That same evening, however, she came breathlessly into her son's sick-room.

"There, Martin!" she cried, "didn't I say so? Your wife has been thoroughly enjoying herself all these months. A butterfly she was born, and a butterfly she will die! What do you think she has been doing? But you'd never guess, so I may as well tell you. She has met actress. She is queening it in London as Pauline Deschanelles, Rosalind, Juliet—I don't know what all—she, the granddaughter-in-law of a clergyman! Impossible? Certainly it isn't impossible. Fred Heaton, saw her with his own eyes. She's playing under the name of Nellie Rice, and she's made a great sensation, Heaton says. And she has been offered a fabulous sum to go to America for the winter. Oh, you needn't expect to see her here!"

"There is some mistake," said Martin, calmly. "My timid little Nellie on the stage! It's simply impossible! Why, she would colour and turn pale if anyone looked at her!"

"Well, we shall see," said Mrs. Bates.

The week passed by, and no answer came to the letter.

"I knew it!" said the mother-in-law.

But the words were still on her lips when the door opened and in walked Nellie herself.

Martin lifted his head from the pillow, with a cry of joy.

"You have come back, Nellie!"

"Yes," she said, "I have come back. I am sorry, Martin; that you are ill. I should have returned before, only I had not quite completed my arrangements. I have been earning money—and they tell me I am not a bad actress. I wanted to do at least as well as Mrs. Hartley and Mrs. Felton. To be told that I was utterly useless! It hurt me, Martin—it hurt me cruelly!"

"Nellie!"

"But you cannot taunt me any more with my helplessness. Here is a cheque for one thousand pounds. Will it help you in your business? I have toiled steadily! I have saved so carefully! Take it, Martin; and I have received a still more advantageous offer to go abroad for a season."

"And leave me, Nellie?"

"Will it matter much?"

"But, Nellie, I am your husband! I love you!"

She looked at him with blue, questioning eyes, like frozen stars.

"You—love—me? Did you love me that day when you told me—"

She checked herself, with a shiver.

"Listen, Martin! Did you ever see a gold-winged butterfly, floating in the sunshine, all life, all joy? Did you ever see it struck down in an instant? Well, my heart was that butterfly. Your cruel words were the death-stroke. To me life will never again be what it was; but ambition still remains. Take this money that I have earned as the nucleus to build up new fortunes. Perhaps Mrs. Hartley herself could not have done better. And I will go and earn more. We shall both be occupied. We can both forget the folly of our young days, when we fancied that love was all the world!"

Martin Bates looked at her with startled eyes. By what strange coincidence had she selected the very simile on which his mother had so often enlarged—a butterfly? Was she indeed fluttering from his hold?

"Nellie," he said, slowly, "you are amply avenged, if vengeance is what you want. For the wreck of my fortunes I care little, but if I have, through my own folly, lost you, then Heaven help me, for I do not care to live longer!"

He clasped both thin hands over his eyes, with a groan that came from his very heart.

"A butterfly!" croaked the old woman.

"She owns it herself. A butterfly, and nothing else!"

Nellie had moved a pace nearer to the bed, and was looking intently at her husband's pain-sharpened face. In a second she knelt on the floor at his side.

"Look at me, Martin!" she cried. "Tell me that you want me to stay—that you really love me! Oh, my husband—my husband! If all the world were tempting me from you, one word would keep me at your side! Only say once more that you love me!"

"Nellie, my own wife!"

Mrs. Bates crept softly from the room, her hard face twitching.

"I believe she's got some heart after all," muttered she.

There is an old proverb which says, "How blessings brighten as they take their flight!"

And Martin Bates had never known how passionately he loved his wife until he fancied he had lost her for ever.

"And all through my own folly," he said. "Heaven has been far kinder to me than I deserve!"

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Helpful Talks

BY THE EDITOR.

The Editor is pleased to hear from his readers at any time.

All letters must give the name and address of the writers, not for publication, but as a guarantee of good faith.

LADY F.—Drinking vinegar is very dangerous, and will never permanently improve your complexion.

PRISCILLA.—For flushed faces, let the following dry on the skin: Tannic acid, fifteen grains, mixed with five ounces of camphor-water.

L. C. C.—Nothing unnatural can be really beautiful. A sixteen inch waist is not only unnatural, but dangerous, and of course causes the blotchy skin of which you complain.

MRS. M.—Cure yourself of the smile. Most assuredly your face will line round the mouth if you are ever smiling; besides, the "smile perpetual" soon becomes hard and unfeeling and loses its charm.

RAYMOND.—No special dependence can be placed on a judgment of character formed by an examination of one's handwriting, as it does not always prove a true index to the mental characteristics of its originator. Yours would appear to indicate a bold, straightforward, honest character.

ALEX.—I should say that sea-bathing, when the weather is warm enough, should do you a lot of good. You must be careful, however, since you are not over strong, to choose a time for bathing when you are not tired or overheated. Wet your head directly you go in the water, and keep moving all the time you remain in, which should not be more than ten minutes.

"BONHEUR."—From your letter I gather that the mark on your upper lip is a birth-mark. Many birth-marks appear only at certain times, and they cannot be removed permanently by means of lotions or creams. The only certain cure is electrolysis. If, however, you cannot afford this I fear there is nothing to be done but to hide the mark when it appears with an application of powder over a little face cream.

PHYLLIS.—To scent veils and gloves, roll the veiling carefully round a long-scented cushion or bolster, filled with a mixture composed of 4lb. of powderedorris-root, 14oz. of gum benjamin, and 3oz. of powdered cloves and cinnamon. Pound and mix all thoroughly, and fill the bolster so that it presents a firm surface. The under cover may be of muslin or saten. An ornamental cover of silk embroidered with the owner's monogram or favourite flower should be stitched over the inner bag.

MRS. CARTER.—Strawberry jam is not difficult to make. Try the following recipe, which I hope will prove successful. To six pounds of strawberries allow three pounds of sugar. Put the berries into a pan over a moderate fire; boil them for half an hour, keeping them constantly stirred. Break the sugar into small pieces, and mix them with the strawberries, after they have been removed from the fire. Then place the pan again over the fire and boil for another half an hour very quickly. Put the jam into pots, and when cold, cover it with paper moistened with the white of egg.

ORANGE.—Such a theory of the succession to the Crown is fanciful and absurd. The succession is strictly hereditary. After the Prince of Wales comes his sons, then his daughter or daughters. Failing the direct line of the Prince of Wales and his children, the Princess Louise (Duchess of Fife) would succeed, then her children. Failing all these the Princess Victoria would be Queen, and failing her the Princess Maud. If by any strange and awful cataclysm the whole family of the King were to disappear the succession would then go to the family of the late Duke of Saxe-Coburg.

BABY.—It will take upwards of a year's hard study to master shorthand writing, provided the student evinces an aptitude for it.

ALMA.—Take plenty of exercise, and do not eat sugary or starchy foods, then perhaps the rapid gain in flesh will be arrested.

CLARA.—Medium-soft, small pens are best adapted to the use of ladies, on account of the usual delicacy of their penmanship.

LENA.—The lock of hair sent is of a delicate light-brown colour, and looks as though it had been clipped from the head of some beautiful infant.

T.C.H.—A solution of sulphuric acid is recommended to remove stains from ivory, and also to bleach it.

AN OLD READER.—Remove the varnish from the mahogany by means of fine sand-paper or emery-cloth. This will not injure the wood, although it is a very tedious operation.

LIEBIE S.—Powders of any description applied to the skin, clog up the pores, and by thus interfering with nature's law do infinitely more harm than one can imagine.

WILFUL DOT.—Cold water drunk in moderation certainly has a beneficial effect on the system; but taken in such quantities as a quart at a time cannot but do harm. Your thirst is not natural and evidently needs a proper prescription—see a doctor and follow his advice.

EXECUTRIX.—The duties of an executrix are generally indicated in the will. She has to act as trustee to the property. If you are an executrix and you have any doubts as to how you should proceed, you had better consult a solicitor or some one who has had experience in the duties you are called upon to discharge.

DISCOURAGED JOE.—To relieve night sweats, dissolve fifteen grains of sulphate of quinine in half an ounce of essence of tansy, a quarter of an ounce of alcohol, a quarter of an ounce of water, and thirty drops of muriatic acid. A teaspoonful should be taken two or three times during the day and at bedtime. In connection with this remedy, cold sage tea is recommended to be used freely as a drink.

BERTHA.—A good preventive wash for sunburn is made thus: Borax, two drachms; Roman and camphor, each one drachm; sugar-candy, half an ounce; and ox-gall, one pound. Mix and stir these well ten minutes three or four times a day for fourteen days till it becomes clear. Strain through blotting-paper and bottle up for use. Wash the face in this before going out. If, however, the sun has already caught the cheeks, this is a remedy: Two spoonfuls of sweet cream, half a pint of new milk, the juice of a lemon, and half a glass of good brandy, with a little alum and loaf sugar. Boil these together, skim, and bottle up when cool.

ISABEL.—The nonsense lines run as follows:—"She went into the garden to cut a cabbage leaf, to make an apple-pie; and a great she-bear popped her head through the window, and said, 'What, no soap?' so he died, and she very imprudently married the barber. And there were at the marriage the jobbin' lilies and the pobbin' lilies, and the great panjandrum with the little round bottom on the top, and they danced, and they sang, and they played catch-as-catch-can till the gunpowder ran out of the heels of their shoes." The lines were composed impromptu by Porson or Theodore Hook to defeat somebody's wonderful system of mnemonics. The author said he would compose some lines which the memory of man could not repeat right off; and he did.

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